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# **Responses to Gypsies in Britain 1900-1939**

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**Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of  
History at the University of Northumbria, September 2002**

## **Abstract**

The thesis examines the perceptions and treatment of Gypsies in Britain during the early twentieth century. This enquiry touches upon a number of historically important themes and also has a contemporary relevance. Firstly it outlines the tradition of writing about the Gypsies which had developed over the previous two centuries and considers the treatment of the group in the work of early commentators. Secondly, it explores the nature of stereotypes of the Gypsies in early twentieth century society and considers the ways in which romantic and antipathetic images of the Gypsies could be crafted into a coherent rather than a contradictory body of thought by drawing on ideas of hierarchy and degeneration. Thirdly, it analyses responses to Gypsies from across sedentary society. The focus here is on the treatment of the group by legislators, local authorities, missionaries and scholars. Finally, it argues that responses to the group must be considered as of part of the age-old tradition of hostility towards nomadism in Europe.

The examination of the treatment of the Gypsies in Britain reveals significant differences with their treatment elsewhere in Europe during the same period. Although there is evidence of antipathy towards the Gypsies at every level of British society there is a relative absence of institutionalised intolerance. However, it is evident that the ideas which were used to justify such treatment of the Gypsies elsewhere in Europe were also present in Britain, and that the treatment of immigrant Gypsies by the British state, in particular, reveals that it was not immune from antipathy.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

ED	Board of Education
GLS	Gypsy Lore Society
HLG	Housing
HO	Home Office
JGLS	Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society
LCM	London City Mission Society
MEPO	Metropolitan police
NAS	National Archives of Scotland
NMS	National Museums of Scotland
NSPCC	National Society for the Prevention of Children (Later Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children)
PRO	Public Record Office
SHC	Surrey History Centre
SMGC	Scott Macfie Gypsy Collection
TWTC	Thomas William Thompson Collection
WSRO	West Sussex Record Office

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## Introduction

The Gypsies and other itinerant minorities of Great Britain drifted in and out of the attention of legislators and local authorities during the early twentieth century. On occasion a campaign for new legislation to deal with itinerancy, or the arrival in Britain of a group of foreign Gypsies, would raise the profile of the nomads. Thus at times the question of how to deal with them became an issue for heated debate at both the local and national levels. Yet, on the whole, the Gypsies remained the relatively inconspicuous presence they had been in Britain for centuries.<sup>1</sup> In light of their invisibility, the reasons for undertaking an examination of responses to Gypsies in Britain during the early twentieth century may not be self-evident. Yet the ways in which sedentary society responded to the group during this period are highly significant; they touch upon a number of historically important issues and also have a contemporary relevance.

The first contextual theme within which responses to the Gypsies must be considered is the deep-rooted suspicion and antipathy towards the nomadic way of life which had been apparent throughout Europe for centuries. Studies of vagrancy across the Continent have revealed age-old hostilities towards those who follow an itinerant lifestyle.<sup>2</sup> These feelings have known few political or geographical boundaries and early sources on the Gypsies in Europe testify to the importance of this ingrained animosity towards the wandering life in determining responses to them from the

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<sup>1</sup> P. Slack, "Vagrants and Vagrancy in England 1598-1664", in P. Clark and D. Souden (eds.), *Migration and Society in Early Modern England*, London: Hutchinson, 1987.

<sup>2</sup> A. Beier, *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England 1560-1640*, London: Methuen, 1985.

populations among whom they moved.<sup>3</sup> Such hostility has proven resilient and continues to shape responses to the Gypsies in the present day.

During the early twentieth century this abhorrence for the nomadic way of life was most apparent. Such opposition must be related to the emergence of nation states and the sense of belonging which such states attempted to encourage among their citizens.<sup>4</sup> In these circumstances, the nation was often defined as much in terms of whom it 'excluded' as whom it 'included'. Negative stereotypes of the Gypsies had been circulating in Europe for centuries and thus provided opponents of itinerancy with a whole stock of unflattering images on which to draw to justify their hostility.<sup>5</sup> Through these stereotypes the Gypsies were projected as a group which stood in opposition to the ways of sedentary society. Complaints against the group could be expressed in terms of social, economic, religious, moral, racial, medical or educational objections. Many groups sought the abolition of nomadism through parliamentary legislation. Others approached the Gypsy camps from an evangelical standpoint and endeavoured to raise them up from their existing state by preaching not only Christian values but also the values of permanency, settlement, thrift and industry, all of which were considered vital components of respectability.

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<sup>3</sup> D. Kenrick, and G. Puxon, *The Destiny of Europe's Gypsies*, London: Sussex University Press, 1972. p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> In the wake of the 1848 revolutions fears of working class instability were heightened and politicians of all persuasions recognised the need to reconcile progress with social order and stability. See E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983 and B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, London: Verso, 1983.

<sup>5</sup> D. Mayall, "Egyptians and Vagabonds: Representations of the Gypsy in Early Modern Official and Rogue Literature," in *Immigrants and Minorities*, Vol. 16, No 3, November 1997, pp. 55-82. D. Mayall, "The Making of Gypsy Identities c.1500-1980," in *Immigrants and Minorities*, Vol. 11, No 1, March 1992, pp. 81-101.

The second theme to have a bearing on responses to the Gypsies during the period under review is the upsurge in interest in rural life and the countryside, which arose during the late eighteenth and nineteenth century and came to be associated with the Romantic Movement. This movement developed in response to increasing industrialisation and urbanisation and the fear among of many middle-class artists, writers and scholars that the rural landscape was being swallowed up by the rapidly growing industrial centres. Such concerns led many to romanticise the countryside and in the work of a number of writers the image of the Gypsy became an important symbol of the simple country life which seemed all but lost to the inhabitants of the great towns and cities. George Borrow was a key figure in this tradition, and following in his footsteps, the scholars associated with the Gypsy Lore Society continued to view the Gypsy in this light. Indeed, it is in the work of these individuals that the romantic image of the Gypsy is most evident. However, by the early twentieth century romantic perceptions of Gypsy life went beyond the work of scholars and artists and such images can be found at every level of society. On the whole, such images of the Gypsies were unlikely to be applied by members of the sedentary population to those groups of nomads who arrived in their own localities. However, on occasion, the discrepancy between the romantic stereotype and the reality of the itinerant life did fuel hostility towards members of the nomadic population at the local level. When, for example, during the 1930s the Gypsies began increasingly to travel in motorised vehicles, a number of newspapers expressed contempt for their abandonment of the more picturesque horse-drawn carriages.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Changes in the style of Gypsy caravans during the twentieth century are considered in D. Harvey, *The Gypsies Wagon-time and After*, London: Batsford, 1979. For unfavourable press reports on these changes see for example "Gypsy Caravans" in *Daily Sketch*, 20 May 1939.



The third theme through which to consider responses to Gypsies during the early twentieth century relates to the development within scientific circles of theories of race, racial hierarchy and racial degeneration.<sup>7</sup> During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Gypsies increasingly came to be perceived as biologically or 'racially' distinct both from the sedentary population and the wider vagrant population.<sup>8</sup> There was a tendency among those who studied the so-called races of man to draw them into hierarchies through which certain races came to be regarded as superior while others were considered inferior. The criteria by which the place of a particular group in the hierarchy of man was determined was invariably highly subjective.<sup>9</sup> The highest places were inevitably reserved for the very groups who drew up the models while those who differed most from them in terms of physical appearance and culture were said to occupy the lowest places. The Gypsies who had long been portrayed as being a group which stood in opposition to the sedentary Europeans were particularly susceptible to being allocated a low position in these hierarchical models.

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<sup>7</sup> The meaning of the term 'race' with which this investigation is concerned is that which was applied to it during the early twentieth century. Although the term race was often used as a socio-economic description it was also used in biological sense. It is the biological understanding of the term race, which is of interest to this study. The idea that intellectual, psychological and moral characteristics were biologically determined and could be inferred from physical appearance was highly influential between 1850 and 1945. Inherent in such ideas was the assumption that a hierarchy of races could be placed on men of different nations. Many European scientists attempted to draw up hierarchies of races invariably arguing that the European was the superior race. See D. Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians: English Attitudes to the Negro in the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1978. pp. 14-15. See also, M. Biddiss, "Myths of the Blood: European Racist Ideology 1850-1945" in *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 9, No 5, Sept-Oct, 1975. pp. 11-19.

<sup>8</sup> See D. Mayall, *Gypsies-Travellers in Nineteenth Century Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. W. Willems, *In Search of the True Gypsy: From Enlightenment to Final Solution*, London: Frank Cass, 1997.

<sup>9</sup> See Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians*, p. 16.

During the early twentieth century commentators on the Gypsies continued to draw upon the authority of racial science. Thus, during this period, objections to the nomadic way of life often found their expression in racial discourse and old indictments were embellished with references to the biological difference of the Gypsies and the suggestion that they were an inferior racial group. However, such ideas were compatible with romantic images of the Gypsies which could similarly be linked to the perception of them as a distinct race, less developed and therefore more akin to nature than the sedentary population.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, by way of rationalising the existence of both romantic and antipathetic stereotypes of the group there was a tendency for commentators on the Gypsies to employ the idea of a racial hierarchy within the nomadic population in order to explain the discrepancy between the two sets of images. Such commentaries allowed for the existence of a 'pure' Gypsy who embodied the qualities of romantic stereotypes but claimed that, through a process of racial degeneration, this Gypsy had become scarce and that many nomads were in fact inferior 'half-breeds' or non-Gypsy travellers. These so-called inferior racial types were said to be a troublesome people who required repression while those considered true Gypsies were exonerated from the charges of the negative stereotype. This tendency is most clearly demonstrated in the work of the Gypsy Lore Society.<sup>11</sup> Members of the Society had been deeply affected by the idea that the true Gypsies were dying out. They claimed that many of the nomads who caused a problem for society were not the true Gypsies with whom they were concerned but half-breeds who had degenerated from this original stock. Throughout the early twentieth century

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<sup>10</sup> G. Behlmer, "The Gypsy Problem in Victorian England" in *Victorian Studies*, Vol 28, No 2 (Winter 1985) pp. 231-53.

members of the Society occupied themselves with identifying the characteristics of the mythical true Gypsy.<sup>12</sup>

In short: three broad historical themes have been identified as influential in shaping responses to Gypsies from the sedentary population. Firstly, the deep-rooted hostility towards itinerancy which had existed throughout Europe for centuries. Secondly, perceptions of the relationship between industrial society and the countryside and in particular romantic perceptions of Gypsy life, which maintained a cultural importance throughout the period under review. Thirdly the theories of race, racial hierarchy, and racial degeneration which had achieved a great prominence in social and scientific thought by the beginning of the twentieth century. These three themes formed the basis of the responses of legislators, missionaries, academics and local authorities to the Gypsies. Thus any analysis of responses to the group must be located within this broader framework, whether considering the development and sustainability of the Gypsy stereotypes or the treatment of the group from different sectors of sedentary society.

An examination of the response of any sector of society to the Gypsies would reveal something of the extent to which the perceptions and treatment of the group stemmed from, and were justified in relation to these broader themes. However, the aim is to explore responses to Gypsies from across a broad band of sedentary society, considering the treatment of the group by legislators, local authorities, missionaries and academics. Any one of these areas alone could be a subject for comprehensive

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<sup>11</sup> See A. Russell, *Index of the Old Series Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 1914.

study and in favouring an expansive approach a number of limitations have necessarily been imposed. It has been impossible to conduct a systematic examination of every aspect of any of these approaches or to appreciate fully the extent of diversity of response within each area. Instead, it has been necessary to consider the most notable examples in the treatment of the Gypsies by each group and to draw out patterns in their responses.

However, such a broad scope of enquiry is profitable. The perception and treatment of the Gypsies has not been uniform across sedentary society. Although the stereotypes held about the nomads may have been similar, different sectors of society used these stereotypes in different ways, emphasising that aspect most compatible with their own agenda. Furthermore, there have been examples of overlap and of friction between the responses of different sectors of society to the Gypsies with, for example, the actions of local authorities often contradicting the aspirations of legislators. Thus, an examination of responses from across sedentary society reveals something of the complexities and contradictions in the treatment of the Gypsies.

Responses to Gypsies in Britain during the period under review relied on stereotypes, which had been almost universally accepted by the beginning of the twentieth century. The stereotypes themselves did not develop extensively during the early twentieth century but would be employed differently by particular sectors of society in response to the prevailing circumstances. In light of this observation a thematic structure seems more appropriate than a chronological approach. Therefore the first two chapters discuss the development of stereotypes of the Gypsies and their

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<sup>12</sup> T. Acton, "True Gypsies-Myth and Reality" in *New Society*, 6 June 1974. pp. 563-565.

nature and prevalence in early twentieth century society, while the remaining four chapters deal with responses to the Gypsies from different sectors of society.

Many of the ideas about Gypsies expressed in the work of key British commentators on the group stemmed from the work of writers elsewhere in Europe. Therefore chapter one seeks to locate the images and stereotypes of Gypsies which prevailed in Britain within their wider European context. The development of Gypsy stereotypes and the increasing tendency during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for these to be projected as racial traits has been considered through an examination of various strands of European thought and through the work of individual commentators on the Gypsies. Chapter two focuses more exclusively on the images and stereotypes of Gypsies which could be found in early twentieth century Britain. Ideas about the identity of the Gypsies, their appearance, culture and way of life are explored through an analysis of such images in art, literature, radio-broadcasting, press reports and in the writings of prominent figures.

Chapter three examines the legislative response to Gypsies, explored primarily through an examination of parliamentary papers and files of the Home Office, the Board of Education and the Scottish Office. The focus here is not solely on the way in which the Gypsies were perceived and treated by legislators. Often campaigns for legislation to deal with Gypsies or itinerancy stemmed from concerns or opposition to the group from missionaries or local authorities. Thus even where the proposed legislation never came into force, the debates which raged over the need for such measures provide insights into the responses of other sectors of society. The opposition to legislation from the anti-assimilationist Gypsy Lore Society is also

considered in this chapter. Throughout the early twentieth century members of the Society bitterly opposed any attempts to introduce legislation which they considered might interfere with the Gypsies' way of life. However, the views of the Gypsy Lore Society were more compatible with those who sought the assimilation of the group, than might first appear. Indeed, throughout the period their campaigns focused on the preservation of the rights of the 'true' Gypsies while those considered to be half-breeds were to be left to the mercy of those who called for their assimilation

The themes discussed in chapter four are arguably the most significant responses to the Gypsies of any sector of society. The emphasis is on the ways in which the Gypsies were treated by those with whom they came into most frequent contact. In particular, the focus is on the police, magistrates, local authorities and, where evidence is available, the house-dwelling public. This examination of the responses of local authorities to the Gypsies has relied heavily on the correspondence files of the Home Office. It has also been possible to trace instances of confrontation or interaction between the Gypsies and local authorities through press reports, council minute books, police, and court records and through the papers of local landowners. It was the response of local authorities which would have been most felt by the Gypsies themselves. Their actions frequently involved far more than simply putting legislative measures into practice.

Chapter five explores the approaches taken to the Gypsies by those who sought their moral reform or who hoped to induce them to adopt the Christian religion. A number of groups set out to raise the Gypsies from their alleged moral and religious failings during the early twentieth century. The work of missionary groups

among the Gypsies has been considered through an analysis of the files, reports and journals of the larger organisations caught up in such activity, and, where available, the papers of individual missionaries. It has also been possible to trace the work of a number of small, unaffiliated missions to the Gypsies through local press reports and the records of the Gypsy Lore Society, although there will undoubtedly have been others. In the accounts of those who approached the Gypsies from this direction, the idea that, as children, the Gypsies were socialised into such traits as idleness, criminality and a lack of cleanliness and then progressed into adulthood only to perpetuate the social nuisance caused by their parents, was influential. Thus, the work of many missionaries and social reformers was characterised by relentless efforts to remove the Gypsy children from the degrading influences of their parents. In analysing the work conducted among the Gypsies by missionaries this investigation does not attempt to offer any kind of empirical or other evaluation of the extent to which the goals of missionaries were fulfilled. Some missionaries to the Gypsies did attempt to quantify their success by offering numbers of successful Gypsy conversions. However, the focus in this study is on the perceptions of the Gypsies held by missionaries and the way in which these shaped their approach the group.

Chapter six considers the approach taken by academics to their work on the Gypsies. In considering this response, the investigation has made great use of the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, the correspondence files of the Society and the wider publications of its members.<sup>13</sup> The aim has not been to establish whether the findings were accurate. It would appear that the attachment of members to romantic

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<sup>13</sup> A. Russell, *Index of the Old Series Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*,

images of wanderers did often lead them to place more emphasis on the distinctions between the Gypsies and sedentary society, particularly with regard to their superstitions and rituals, than might be merited. This tendency has likewise been apparent in the work of a number of later writers.<sup>14</sup> However, to reiterate, what is important to this investigation is the way in which members of the Society perceived and treated the subjects of their study rather than the accuracy of the findings themselves.

A heavy reliance on sedentary source material is inevitable in a study of the Gypsies in Britain during this period. Nomadic groups have traditionally placed more importance on oral culture than the written word and so there are few accounts written by the people themselves. Where such detail is available it often paints a romantic picture of Gypsy life. It would seem that such authors have been under pressure to demonstrate that they were of the true Gypsy race and have endeavoured to keep their work in line with romantic images of wanderers. Hence an autobiography by Manfri Wood stressed that:

My father was one of the real old-fashioned Romanies. He believed in the old Romany traditions. His clothes had to be made in the old Romany way.<sup>15</sup>

In further autobiographies there is evidence of the influence of missionaries on the attitudes of the travellers. In the autobiography of 'Gipsy' Rodney Smith who was

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<sup>14</sup> The tendency to place great emphasis on rituals and superstitions can be seen in K. Bercovici, *The Story of the Gypsies*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1929. See also B. Versey-Fitzgerald, *Gypsies of Britain: An Introduction to their History*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1944. More recently the work of E. Trigg, demonstrates a desire to emphasise the separateness of Gypsy culture from that of sedentary society. See J. Berlin, *The New Forest*, London: Galley Press, 1960. See also E. Trigg, *Gypsy Demons and Divinities: The Magic and Religion of the Gypsies*, Secaucus, N.J: Citadel Press, 1973.

<sup>15</sup> M. Wood, *In the Life of a Romany Gypsy*, London: Routledge, 1973. p. 9.



converted to Christianity by the Salvation Army and continued to work for them, there is a tendency to emphasise sin and portray ‘...roaming and wrong doing’ as synonymous.<sup>16</sup> With careful reading it has been possible to use accounts written by members of the nomadic population for the purpose of this study, as a means to gather information about the way in which the travellers felt they were treated by sedentary society.<sup>17</sup> Yet such material is scarce and the fact that over a century has elapsed since the beginning of the period under review also renders the collection of oral reminiscences difficult. Thus it would have been extremely difficult to build up a picture of the treatment of the Gypsies solely from the perspective of the travellers themselves.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, an emphasis has been placed upon the sources left by sedentary society to explore the responses of different sectors of society to the Gypsies.

This reliance on sources from the sedentary population creates a problem of evidence. Nomadic groups whether racially or culturally defined were marginal in British society and rarely came to the attention of legislators, local authorities or the police unless they were perceived to be a nuisance to the sedentary population. The

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<sup>16</sup> R Smith, *His Life and work by Himself*, 1902. p. 49.

<sup>17</sup> S. Boswell, *The Book of Boswell: Autobiography of a Gypsy*, (ed)., J. Seymour, London: Victor Gollancz, 1970.

<sup>18</sup> This study is primarily concerned with responses to Gypsies from sedentary society and has not therefore attempted to build up a picture of the traditions and culture of the travellers themselves through the use of oral reminiscences. However, there are two collections of recorded material which would be of value to a study of the travelling population itself during this period which remains a neglected area. Firstly, many recorded conversations of travellers were collected after the Second World War under the aegis of Hamish Henderson the School of Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh. Although these were recorded after the period under investigation the recollections of older informants stretch back into the early twentieth century. Secondly, the Charles Parker Archive in Birmingham Central Library holds the collection of BBC radio producer Charles Parker (1954-1972) a pioneer of the oral history movement whose collection also includes recordings of traveller folk songs and stories.

evidence therefore could lead one to assume that responses to Gypsies were characterised solely by persecution and harassment by the local authorities. To a certain extent this problem is off-set by the many romantic commentaries on the Gypsies to be found in newspapers and books. Such accounts often highlight those occasions during which the traditions of the nomadic and sedentary populations merged, such as when they came together for the purpose of a fair or race meeting. Furthermore, throughout this study an attempt has been made to draw patterns in the treatment of nomadic groups rather than examining isolated and often extreme examples of antipathy. However, although there must have been many occasions and even prolonged periods where Gypsies remained in an area without attracting attention, there would be little reason in such circumstances for members of sedentary society to keep records. The occasions when the Gypsies were not perceived to be a problem do not, therefore, tend to be written about in history.

Since this study is concerned with images of the Gypsies, created or utilised by sedentary commentators and with the response of sedentary society towards those to whom such images were applied, the focus of the investigation does not lie in the reality of the constitution or identity of the group. No attempt has been made, therefore, to offer a quantitative analysis of the size or constitution of the nomadic population as it existed in early twentieth century Britain. Such statistics are notoriously inaccurate and changes to the way in which the nomadic population was defined for the purpose of collecting census data during the early twentieth century have meant that such information cannot even provide an accurate portrayal of changes in the nomadic population over the period. However, it is interesting to consider some of the contemporary estimates of the size of Britain's Gypsy

population as wildly varying figures were a prominent feature of debates on the group. According to the 1911 census the number of nomadic people in England and Wales was 30,642.<sup>19</sup> However, the same year Robert Scott Macfie of the Gypsy Lore Society, who regarded himself as a friend of the Gypsies, put the figure at 15,000-20,000.<sup>20</sup> By contrast, at the close of the nineteenth century some sectors of the press had put the figure at 50,000, although the Select Committee on Temporary Dwellings regarded this figure as an inflated estimate.<sup>21</sup> Most of those who gave estimates of the Gypsy population did not elaborate on how their figures had been reached. However, a pattern can be discerned in that those who held romantic perceptions of the Gypsies tended to apply strict criteria when judging whether particular groups of nomads could be considered 'true' Gypsies and therefore gave small estimates of their numbers in Britain. On the other hand, those who hoped to persuade the Government to adopt legislative measures to curb nomadism tended to employ much larger estimates and frequently advanced the claim that the number of nomadic people on Britain's roads was rapidly increasing. Thus, although little credibility can be attached to the statistics themselves they can be seen to reflect the motives of those who offered them.

Other statistics have been useful in this investigation. In particular, figures compiled by the Home Office have been used to assess the extent to which particular pieces of legislation were being used against the nomads during the early twentieth

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<sup>19</sup> Mayall, *Gypsies-Travellers in Nineteenth Century Society*, p. 23.

<sup>20</sup> Letter from R. A. S. Macfie to unnamed recipient on the subject of evangelical work among the Gypsies of Great Britain, 31 Oct 1911. [SMGC: A26-A30].

<sup>21</sup> Evidence of George Smith of Coalville to the *Select Committee on Temporary Dwellings*, 9 Aug 1887. par 364-366.

century. Such data helps to put examples of Gypsy prosecutions in court records and press reports into a broader perspective. Statistics are also available on the prevalence of crime among the Gypsies, although the source of these details and the method by which they have been compiled do present limitations.

In examining responses to nomadic groups in early twentieth century Britain this investigation has also been faced with a problem of terminology. In particular, the use of terms such as 'Gypsy', 'Romany', 'Tinker', 'Tinkler', 'half-Gypsy', 'Didikias', 'posh-rat', 'mumper', 'tramp' and 'vagrant' create two difficulties.<sup>22</sup> Firstly, in early twentieth century source material these terms are used widely and without restraint with different meanings being attached to them in different sources. The second problem arises from the fact that some of these terms are considered unacceptable today. The first problem can be overcome, since, with careful reading, it is usually possible to determine the way in which these terms are being employed in different sources. Furthermore, the focus does not lie in the precise meaning of the terms but in the stereotypes attached to them and the responses they provoked. With regards to the second problem, Michael Banton has pointed out the problems of considering past societies in which race-consciousness was not apparent in terms of modern ideas of racism.<sup>23</sup> Although early twentieth century Britain was undoubtedly a race-conscious society the term 'Tinker' was not regarded as a racially abusive or

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<sup>22</sup> The terms 'didikais' and 'posh-rat' have originated from the Romani language. However, these terms were used particularly by members of the Gypsies Lore Society during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as terms to be applied to those Gypsies whom they regarded as 'half-breed' or degenerate people. For a fuller discussion of the origins of such terms see B. Adams, J. Okley, D. Morgan, D. Smith, *Gypsies and Government Policy in England*, London: Heinemann 1975. J. Sandford, *Gypsies*, London: Martin Secker and Warburg, 1973. p. 29-30.

<sup>23</sup> M. Banton "The Concept of Racism" in S. Zubaida, *Race and Racism*, London: Tavistock, 1970. p. 18.

derogatory term during this period. Therefore, in light of the fact that definitions constantly change, it seems appropriate to employ the terms in a manner consistent with the source material rather than to project current trends in terminology onto this investigation.

For the purpose of this investigation, it has been convenient therefore to employ the terms 'Gypsy' and 'Tinker'. The terms have not been used interchangeably but in a manner consistent with the source material. On the whole, during the early twentieth century the two labels were believed to be concerned with different groups. The term 'Gypsy', which originated from the word 'Egyptian', had an implicit racial dimension and was used in relation to those itinerant groups in England and Wales who had come to be regarded as being of Indian origin. The term 'Tinker' on the other hand was an economic term employed, during the early twentieth century, when reference was made to Scottish nomads, although, it too, was often used in a bio-scientific sense as a racial description. The use of separate terms within this investigation in no way represents an attempt to draw up racial or other distinctions between these groups.

Some scholars during the early twentieth century did endeavour to draw further distinctions between members of the nomadic population. Often the term 'Romany' was applied to those nomads who satisfied a particular commentator's romantic perceptions of a true Gypsy while terms such as 'half-breed' were applied, often in a derogatory sense, to those who were considered to fall short of what was expected of the true Gypsy. The criteria were thus highly subjective rendering such

distinctions of little real value and often proving extremely detrimental to the welfare to all those who followed a nomadic way of life.<sup>24</sup>

The only distinction within the nomadic population which has been observed in this study is the tendency to differentiate between the groups such as Gypsies and the homeless, wandering poor or seasonal labourers who moved from the town to the country at harvest time. Although many of those referred to as Gypsies and Tinkers did take to sedentary accommodation at certain times of year they were regarded as distinct from other nomads in a number of respects during the early twentieth century. It is in keeping with the views held about these groups during the period under review that these nomads have been defined for the purpose of this study. Firstly, they were considered to follow an itinerant life style for reasons of habit, tradition and culture as much as for economic necessity. Secondly, they were believed to be distinguishable from other nomads by their economic independence, self-sufficiency and the unlikelihood that they would fall back on the safeguards of the state such as casual wards and work houses. Thirdly, they tended to travel in family groups and could often be found camped together in large social groups.

In recent years a considerable amount of attention has been paid to Gypsies by academics. The deep-rooted hostilities towards nomadism have also been considered in a number of works dealing with the question of vagrancy. Studies of the Gypsies elsewhere in Europe during the early twentieth century have demonstrated the impact

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<sup>24</sup> In particular this approach can be seen in the work of the nineteenth and early twentieth century Gypsy Lore Society. However, other academics also adopted this approach. For example C. Duff's foreword to J. Clébert, *The Gypsies*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967 (first published as *Les Tziganes*, Paris: B. Arthaud, 1961) reveals an attempt to attach working meanings to the terms such as 'half-breed' and 'mumper'.

which scientific theories of race and racial hierarchy had on responses to the group from the sedentary populations among whom they moved.<sup>25</sup> In particular the focus of such research has been on Eastern Europe and Germany, and in particular the horrors experienced by European Gypsies in the Nazi death camps.<sup>26</sup> Such studies illuminate the way in which the Gypsies became entangled in the web of racial theories, which developed during the nineteenth century, and remained prominent across Europe throughout the early twentieth century. In light of the sluggishness of European governments in acknowledging the persecution of the Gypsies by the Nazis, the reason for the focus on the treatment of Gypsies in Germany is clear.<sup>27</sup> Yet this overwhelming tendency to concentrate on the most extreme examples of racial antipathy towards the Gypsies has enabled the treatment of the group elsewhere in Europe during this vital period, to pale into insignificance. The difficulties in focusing too exclusively on those nations in whose history lie the most extreme examples of hostility towards minority groups have been discussed elsewhere. Colin Holmes warns of the dangers of unwittingly imposing a ranking on nations, whereby particular countries come to be regarded as the most intolerant and, by implication, examples of intolerance within the history of other nations are forgotten.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> D. Crowe and J. Kolsti, *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe*, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1991; see also A. Fraser, *The Gypsies*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992; and also J. Liegeois, *Gypsies: An Illustrated History*, London: Al Saqi Books, 1986.

<sup>26</sup> I. Hancock, *The Pariah Syndrome*, Michigan: Karoma Publishers, 1987. D. Kenrick and G. Puxon, *The Destiny of Europe's Gypsies*, London: Sussex University Press, 1972.

<sup>27</sup> G. Puxon, "Forgotten Victims: Plight of the Gypsies" in *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. II, No. I, March-April, 1977. pp. 23-28.

<sup>28</sup> C. Holmes, *A Tolerant Country? Immigrants, Refugees and Minorities in Britain*, London: Faber and Faber, 1991. p. 107-110. See also C. Holmes, (ed.), *Immigrants and Minorities in British Society*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1978.

The tendency to overlook the question of intolerance towards Gypsies in Britain was to a certain extent overcome with the publication of a number of sociological studies during the 1970s, in particular Thomas Acton's *Gypsy Politics and Social Change*.<sup>29</sup> However, it was not until 1988 that the first comprehensive historical study of the British Gypsies, David Mayall's *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth Century Society*, was published.<sup>30</sup> This book explores not only instances of open hostility towards Gypsies but considers other forms of intolerance, less immediately apparent. Mayall also examines the importance of the construction of Gypsy identity and ideas on race and hierarchy to the treatment of the group in nineteenth century society. More recently the relationship between the work of key British commentators on the Gypsies and perceptions and treatment of the group elsewhere in Europe has been the subject of comprehensive analysis by Wim Willems.<sup>31</sup> Yet the absence of any detailed study of the way in which antipathy towards itinerants, ideas on race and racial hierarchy and romanticism shaped responses to Gypsies in Britain during the early twentieth century has remained conspicuous. This investigation aims to go some way towards rectifying this situation. The study traces the vicissitudes of the Gypsies in Britain between 1900 and 1939. At the beginning of this period ideas of race and racial hierarchy were already well established in Britain. However, they were to become particularly important in

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<sup>29</sup> For example T. Acton, *Gypsy Politics and Social Change*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974. Adams, Okley, Morgan, Smith, *Gypsies and Government Policy in England*, J. Sandford, *Gypsies*, London: Martin Secker and Warburg, 1973.

<sup>30</sup> Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth Century Society*, This book is a revised version of a University of Sheffield PhD thesis. See D. Mayall "Itinerant Minorities in England and Wales in the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century", 1981.

<sup>31</sup> W. Willems, *In Search of the True Gypsy: From Enlightenment to Final Solution*, London: Frank Cass, 1997. See also L. Lucassen, W. Willems, and A. Cottaar, *Gypsies and Other Itinerant Groups: A Socio-Historical Approach*, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998.



shaping responses to the Gypsies in the years leading up to the passage of the 1905 Aliens Act and continued to influence the treatment of Gypsies in Britain throughout the period under review. By 1939 scientists were increasingly moving away from attempts to draw the people of the world into distinct watertight categories and construct racial hierarchies, although such ideas continued to influence the images and treatment of Gypsies and can be detected throughout the twentieth century.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century many minority groups in Britain continue to be perceived in terms of the stereotypes projected on to them by the majority society. However, most groups have won the right to protection from discrimination by law. The Gypsies have not.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, throughout the world these itinerant groups have remained outsiders, vulnerable to discriminatory treatment from every level of sedentary society.<sup>33</sup> The reasons for this are complex. Historically, the nomadic way of life has been seen to stand in ideological and cultural opposition to the value placed upon permanence, stability and settlement by sedentary society. Furthermore, for a great part of their history in Europe itinerant groups have been without economic strength or a political voice. Thus, they have been unable to defend themselves from accusations levelled at them by sedentary commentators. Yet still more salient is the issue of race and identity. There has been a sense of confusion among governments over whether the Gypsies are a minority group in need of protection or a criminal population in need of suppression. Although stereotypes of

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<sup>32</sup> Although in 1988 the Court of Appeal confirmed that 'Gypsies' in the sense of 'Romanies' were recognised as an ethnic group under the terms of the 1976 Race Relations Act, expressions of antipathy and discrimination against the group have continued to be excused through the claim that the individuals concerned are not 'true' Romanies but impostors who masquerade as such.

<sup>33</sup> I. Hancock, "The Roots of Inequality: Romani Cultural Rights and their Historical and Social Context" in *Immigrants and Minorities*, Vol. 11, No. 1. March 1992. p. 3-20.

the Gypsies for over two centuries have, depicted them as a distinct race from the sedentary European, factors such as their lack of an obvious homeland and their political weakness, have enabled modern governments, to avoid offering them the protection afforded to other ethnic minorities. Indeed, in 2001 the British government ordered officials to single out individuals of Roma origin among those leaving the Czech Republic and prevent them boarding aircraft headed for Britain.<sup>34</sup> This course of action was taken in order to prevent those of Roma origin entering Britain as asylum seekers. In fact, politicians in Britain and elsewhere, often turn to ideas about the racial identity of the Gypsies by way of justifying their unwillingness to offer them protection as a minority group. Recently Jack Straw, claimed that, there were in Britain a superior group of 'real Romanies' while simultaneously denouncing the majority of itinerants as a group who merely 'masquerade as Travellers or Gypsies'.<sup>35</sup> Thus, while governments are anxious to proclaim their desire to protect minority groups, the argument that among itinerants are many who merely pretend to be part of a legitimate minority has been used to justify a policy, which is, at best one of indifference and at worst suppression. The parallels between the situation which prevailed during the early twentieth century and that which prevails at the beginning of the twenty- first century are striking.

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<sup>34</sup> See internet site: [hiit://www.refugees.org/world/countryrpt/europe/czech\\_republic.htm](http://hiit://www.refugees.org/world/countryrpt/europe/czech_republic.htm)

<sup>35</sup> D. Kenrick and C. Clark, *Moving On The Gypsies and Travellers of Britain*, Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2000, p. 12.

## **Part One**

## Chapter One

### Historical Background

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Gypsies, like the Jews, had been living for centuries as a minority group within European society. As a minority, they often met with suspicion and antipathy from the sedentary population, and were regarded, within governing circles, as cause for concern. At times, European governments pursued harsh and repressive policies in dealing with the Gypsies and there are examples of barbaric treatment being meted out to the group from across the continent.<sup>1</sup> For their part, the Gypsies remained a largely silent minority without economic strength or a political voice. The importance attached by the group to oral culture rather than the written word contributed to this invisibility and for centuries, they offered scarcely any written accounts of their own history and culture. This silence, set against the background of suspicion, fear and contempt expressed towards the group by sedentary Europeans created a vacuum. There was a thirst for knowledge about the group, yet they remained a people about whom little was known.

Over the centuries numerous European commentators stepped in and attempted to fill this void; offering their own accounts of the Gypsies. Indeed, despite their marginality, the group attracted the attention of scholars, artists, religious reformers, philanthropists and others from across the continent. Hence by the middle

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<sup>1</sup> On the treatment of European Gypsies see G. Puxon, "Forgotten Victims: Plight of the Gypsies" in *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. II, No. I, March-April, 1977. pp. 23-28; D. Crowe and J. Kolsti, *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe*, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1991. See also A. Fraser, *The Gypsies*, Oxford: Basil: Blackwell Publishers, 1992; and also J. Liégeois, *Gypsies: An Illustrated History*, London: Al Saqi Books, 1986. D. Kenrick, and G. Puxon, *The Destiny of Europe's Gypsies*, London: Sussex University Press, 1972. p. 18. And on Britain see D. Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth Century Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

of the twentieth century a student interested in the Gypsies would have been overwhelmed by the quantity of published material which had amassed on the chosen subject.<sup>2</sup> The motivations of those who approached the Gypsies were varied. Yet, there was a shared interest in acquiring and disseminating knowledge about the group. At times, this curiosity was fuelled, or at least paralleled, by a hope on the part of the commentator that his or her findings could lead to the adoption of a particular political, evangelical or social policy for dealing with the Gypsies. Other writers approached the Gypsies out of a sense of disquiet about their own sedentary way of life and in so doing sought the fulfilment of a personal need.

In many instances, such scholars enjoyed only a very limited contact with the people themselves and preferred instead to rely on the work of earlier scholars or old and unaccountable sources. Thus, many accounts of the Gypsies written during the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were not the result of personal observation and a number are riddled with plagiarism. Yet during the early twentieth century, these same accounts were influential in informing attitudes towards the Gypsies from across sedentary society.

### **The Gypsies and their Sedentary Commentators**

One of the most important European academics who contributed to the development of ideas about the Gypsies was German historian, Heinrich Grellmann

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<sup>2</sup> See G. Black *A Gypsy Bibliography*, Edinburgh: University Press, 1914; D. Binns, *A Gypsy Bibliography*, Manchester: Dennis Binns Publications, 1982.

(1753-1804), who published his *Dissertation on the Gypsies* in 1783.<sup>3</sup> Grellmann was not the first scholar to offer a comprehensive study of the Gypsies, and in fact he plagiarised much of his work from earlier academics. However, the timing of his dissertation facilitated its rapid rise to prominence across Europe and ensured that it was this volume rather than the work of previous scholars, which came to shape ideas about the Gypsies for generations. The influence of Grellmann's work was aided by the fact that it was published during a period in which public awareness of the presence of Gypsies had been heightened by accusations of cannibalism made against them in the Hungarian district of Honth in 1782.<sup>4</sup>

The work of Grellmann, in common with many early accounts on the Gypsies, represented an attempt to draw up a model of the physical appearance, behaviour and culture, which he claimed to be characteristic of all Gypsies from across the Continent. The pattern he presented was intensely negative and embodied the fears and accusations that had been hurled at the Gypsies throughout the ages. The damning images served up in his account served to justify the harsh treatment of the group already being meted out across Europe and enabled the behaviour of this 'savage' people to be drawn into a predictable pattern.

Grellmann's work presented the Gypsies as a group apart from sedentary Europeans. He pointed to linguistic evidence and argued that the group had migrated to Europe from a single homeland, most likely to have been India. The Gypsies, he

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<sup>3</sup> H. Grellmann, *Dissertation on Gypsies, being a historical enquiry, concerning the manner of life, economy, customs and conditions of these people in Europe, and their Origin*, (1783) trans Matthew Raper, London, 1787.

<sup>4</sup> W. Willems, *In Search of the True Gypsy: From Enlightenment to Final Solution*, London: Frank

claimed, never married a person who was not of the 'true Gipsey breed' and had never mixed with the native populations of Europe.<sup>5</sup> They had therefore remained distinct from their receiving societies and could be found everywhere the same. This assessment of the Gypsies was in keeping with the interest of many eighteenth and nineteenth century scientists in drawing the peoples of the world into clearly defined and therefore controllable categories.<sup>6</sup> Having denied that the divisions he drew between the Gypsies and sedentary Europeans were permeable, Grellmann was able to claim that the culture, language, physique and behaviour of all the Gypsies across the Continent would be consistent with the stereotype he laid down.

Grellmann considered that the Gypsies were a savage and primitive people, the very lowest form of man. He argued that '...these people are still the rude, unpolished creatures that nature formed them or at most have advanced only one degree towards humanity'.<sup>7</sup> In considering the characteristics of the Gypsies, the scholar drew direct comparisons with the sedentary population. Many of his arguments were intended to shock and disgust, widen the gulf already believed to exist between the Gypsies and sedentary Europeans, and thus submerge any sense of a common humanity:

Let us reflect on how different they are from Europeans: the one is white, the other black; this clothes himself, the other goes half-naked; this shudders at the thought of eating carrion, the other negales on it as a dainty.<sup>8</sup>

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Cass, 1997. p. 27.

<sup>5</sup> Grellmann, *Dissertation on the Gipsies*, p. 61.

<sup>6</sup> D. Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians: English Attitudes to the Negro in the Mid Nineteenth Century*, Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1978. p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> Grellmann, *Dissertation on the Gipsies*, p. 31. This was repeated by many scholars over the following 150 years, see for example, R. Numelin, *The Wandering Spirit: A Study of Human Migration*, London: Macmillan, 1937. p. 178.

<sup>8</sup> Grellmann, *Dissertation on the Gipsies*, p. viii.

Grellmann used the idea that the Gypsies were dark skinned in order to repel the late eighteenth century reader. Surprisingly perhaps, given the interest in hereditary characteristics in the work of later writers, he argued that dark skin which was such a ‘...disgusting sight to the European’ was largely due to way of life.<sup>9</sup> In the case of the Gypsies, he attributed their skin colour to the dirt and smoke from their campfires. He argued that Gypsies, like Laplanders and Siberians ‘...would long ago have divested of their swarthy complexions, if they had discontinued their filthy mode of living’.<sup>10</sup> The way in which Grellmann related dark skin to environmental rather than hereditary factors was in fact consistent with the work of many scholars who studied populations outside Europe during the period in which he was writing. The Rev Samuel Stanhope Smith for example, argued that eating uncooked food and living without clothes led to the dark skin and coarse features associated with the so-called savage tribes.<sup>11</sup>

Other aspects of the work of Grellmann were also intended to evoke a feeling of disgust among his contemporaries. Through the accusation of nakedness, Grellmann linked the Gypsies with animality, with absence of shame, and, by implication, with sexual promiscuity.<sup>12</sup> The sexual deviance of the Gypsies was

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<sup>9</sup> Grellmann, *Dissertation on the Gypsies*, p. 10. Ideas about the dirtiness of the Gypsies continued to influence academics and others throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century, see M. Block, *Gypsies. Their Life and Customs*, (trans) B. Kuczynski and D. Taylor, 1938.

<sup>10</sup> Grellmann, *Dissertation on the Gypsies*, P 11. This assertion is repeated in H. Woodcock, *The Gypsies: Being A Brief Account of the History, Origins, Capabilities, Manners and Customs with suggestions for the Reformation and Conversion of the English Gypsies*, London: William Lister, 1865. p. 36.

<sup>11</sup> N. Stepan *The Idea of Race in Science 1800-1960*, Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1982. p. 37.

<sup>12</sup> G. Jahoda, *Images of Savages, Ancient Roots of Modern Prejudice in Western Culture*, London: Routledge, 1999. p. 97.



further emphasised in his assertion that sibling incest occurred amongst them.<sup>13</sup> He added that the dancing of the Gypsy woman was ‘...the most disgusting that can be conceived, always ending with fulsome grimaces, or the most lascivious attitudes and gestures...’ and that young girls would ‘...exhibit their dexterity to anybody who is pleased with these unseemly dances’. Thus, the Gypsies were presented as the antipode to European conceptions of decency and respectability.

The scholar also gave force to the rumours of Gypsy cannibalism which were circulating throughout Europe. Grellmann suggested the reason that so few examples of Gypsy cannibalism could be found in history was the preference for Gypsies to eat the flesh of their own relatives, the deaths of whom could be covered up. He added that evidence from Hungary seemed to suggest that the Gypsies had a particular preference for eating the young.<sup>14</sup> Grellmann took this evidence as adding weight to the rumours already in existence that Gypsies stole children.<sup>15</sup> Although Grellmann offered no sources in defence of his claims, the charge of such cannibalism was a powerful symbol of savagery, and his work was taken as a warning to those in authority of the potential threat posed by the group.<sup>16</sup>

Grellmann used his work as a vehicle for expressing his interest in reforming the Gypsies. He was convinced that the state had a responsibility to instruct these people through compulsory education and missionary work and the ideas that he

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<sup>13</sup> Grellmann, *Dissertation on the Gipsies*, p. 29.

<sup>14</sup> Grellmann, *Dissertation on Gipsies*, p. 18.

<sup>15</sup> A number of instances in which Gypsies were alleged to have stolen children during the early twentieth century are discussed in chapter two.

<sup>16</sup> Willems, *In Search of the True Gypsy: From Enlightenment to Final Solution*, p. 71.

presented with regard to the reformation of the Gypsies came to play a significant part in shaping the work of later religious reformers, missionaries and scholars. It was already commonly believed that the Gypsies were an irreligious people and Grellmann repeated, the old proverb: 'The Gipsy's church was built with bacon and the dogs ate it'.<sup>17</sup> He added, the idea that the Gypsies were fickle in matters of religion, arguing that:

They suffer themselves to be baptised in Christian countries; among Mahometans to be circumcised. They are Greeks with Greeks, Catholics with Catholics and again profess themselves to be Protestants, whenever they happen to reside where Protestantism prevails.<sup>18</sup>

In short, Gypsies would only pretend to submit to the efforts of missionaries.<sup>19</sup> However, Grellmann believed that the Gypsies could be raised from their existing state and wrote with admiration of the plans of Empress Theresa of Austria to convert the Gypsies within her dominions.<sup>20</sup>

Grellmann's emphasis on bringing about the reformation of the Gypsies provides an insight into his understanding of the group. Indeed, although he believed that the Gypsies had originated from a common homeland and could be found to exhibit the same moral and behavioural characteristics, his understanding of the group was cultural rather than biological. Whereas later scholars, came to consider that these characteristics were determined by heredity and not therefore subject to change, Grellmann insisted, that, changes in the character and habits of the Gypsy could be

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<sup>17</sup> Grellmann, *Dissertation on the Gipsies*. p. 81. See also Champion, S. Gurney, *Racial proverbs*, London: Routledge, 1938. p. 469.

<sup>18</sup> Grellmann, *Dissertation on the Gipsies*, p. 79.

<sup>19</sup> Grellmann, *Dissertation on the Gipsies*, p. 25.

<sup>20</sup> E. Trigg, *Gypsy Demons and Divinities. The Magic and Religion of the Gypsies*, Seaucus, N.J:

brought about through socialisation. However, he argued that due to the instinctive wandering of the Gypsy, it would only be possible to work towards the reformation of the children. Even among the children he claimed there was a possibility that, '...on a sudden his wild nature would appear, a relapse follow..'. and the child would return once again to a wandering life-style.<sup>21</sup> Grellmann's emphasis on the importance of working among Gypsy children was not lost on those evangelists who turned their attention to the group over the decades that followed. The separation of the children from the influences of their parents came to characterise the efforts of future missionaries who sought the group's reformation.

The accounts written by those who took an interest in the Gypsies in the decades that followed the publication of Grellmann's dissertation, reveal a great debt to his work. His stamp of authority in the eyes of British scholars is evident in Black's *A Gypsy Bibliography* (1914), which included numerous texts which had been derived from the work of Grellmann or heavily influenced by him.<sup>22</sup>

The early efforts of British missionaries who turned their attention to the Gypsies were certainly informed by Grellmann. The most influential British missionary to write a book on the Gypsies during the nineteenth century, John Hoyland (1750-1831), a Sheffield-born member of the Society of Friends, was indebted to Grellmann both in forming his ideas about the Gypsies and as regards suggestions for their improvement. In fact, Hoyland plagiarised many paragraphs

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Citadel Press, 1973. p. 13.

<sup>21</sup> Grellmann, *Dissertation on the Gipsies*, p. ix.

<sup>22</sup> Black, *A Gypsy Bibliography*. Numerous later scholars acknowledge their debt to Grellmann, see for example, Block, *Gypsies. Their Life and Customs*, p. 4. See also Woodcock, *The Gypsies*,

from Grellmann whom he described as a 'humane and intelligent biographer' to the Gypsies.<sup>23</sup>

Hoyland's work among the Gypsies began in 1815. An interest in reforming the group had developed among the Quakers in Britain and Hoyland was invited to conduct some preliminary research into the British Gypsies on behalf of that Society, and to obtain information about the possibility of reform.<sup>24</sup> Following in the example of his predecessor, Grellmann, Hoyland attempted to investigate and record the Gypsies' customs and habits and his findings were published in his, *A Historical Survey of the Customs, Habits and Present State of the Gypsies*, in 1816.<sup>25</sup> Some of his research was conducted by sending out a circular letter and questionnaire to the clergy and laity in most English counties.<sup>26</sup> However, he also supplemented the information he received from this source with his own observations from visits to encampments in Northamptonshire, Hainault Forest and Norwood.<sup>27</sup>

Like Grellmann, Hoyland considered the Gypsies to have originated from a common homeland and believed they had thereafter remained distinct from the people among whom they moved. He argued that '...no one of them marries a person

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<sup>23</sup>J. Hoyland, *A Historical Survey of the Customs, Habits and present state of the Gypsies*, London: Darton Harvey and Co, 1816. p. 235.

<sup>24</sup> D. Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth Century Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. pp. 100-101.

<sup>25</sup> Hoyland, *A Historical Survey of the Customs, Habits and present state of the Gypsies*, 1816.

<sup>26</sup> See Hoyland, *A Historical Survey of the Customs, Habits and present state of the Gypsies*, p. 163-4 for copy of the questionnaire.

<sup>27</sup> See Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth Century Society*, p. 100. For reproduction of responses of the questionnaire issued by Hoyland see his, *A Historical Survey of the Customs, Habits and present state of the Gypsies*, pp. 158-68.

who is not of Gypsey extraction'.<sup>28</sup> It was possible, therefore, he believed, to identify them by their physical features and complexion. His opinions of the character of the Gypsy also echoed those of Grellmann, and although Hoyland expressed a degree of sympathy for the Gypsies, particularly their children, he argued that they possessed an array of abhorrent moral and behavioural traits.<sup>29</sup> He employed the same derogatory images as his predecessor, presenting the Gypsies as an 'uncivilised people' who were '...but little removed from savage life' and characterised by irreligion, insanitary habits and idleness.<sup>30</sup> He wrote: 'We have seen that the Gypsies are in the highest degree filthy and disgusting; and fraudulent to excess'.<sup>31</sup>

Hoyland considered that there was an urgent need to raise the Gypsies out of their degraded condition. His programme for reform was intended not only to bring about the conversion of the group to Christianity, but also aimed at reforming their way of life, and alleviating the moral problems he associated with it. Hoyland emphasised the importance of settling the Gypsies and accepted that, if necessary, force should be used to facilitate this end. Like Grellmann, he was convinced that the best way to eradicate the nomadic way of life was by educating and instructing the children of the nomads. He argued that if, after an education in a charitable institution, the boys could be found a respectable trade and the girls sent into

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<sup>28</sup> Hoyland, *A Historical Survey of the Customs, Habits and present state of the Gypsies*, p. 38 and p. 103 for comments on physical appearance.

<sup>29</sup> Hoyland expressed a certain amount of sympathy for the group in the circular he sent out to the English parishes in the hope of obtaining more information about the Gypsies. He also expressed sympathy for the hardships he believed the out-door-life of the Gypsies inflicted on their children. See his *A Historical Survey of the Customs, Habits and present state of the Gypsies*, p. 38.

<sup>30</sup> First quotation taken from Hoyland, *A Historical Survey of the Customs, Habits and present state of the Gypsies*, p. 39 and second quotation taken from p. 200. Nineteenth century ideas on the religion of the Gypsies are also explored in Trigg, *Gypsy Demons and Divinities*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>31</sup> Hoyland, *A Historical Survey of the Customs, Habits and present state of the Gypsies*, p. 123-124.

domestic service, then they would be prevented from following in the ways of their parents.<sup>32</sup>

Hoyland's scheme, then, required a great deal both of the Gypsies and of sedentary society. The Gypsies were obliged to give up their nomadic habits and adopt sedentary patterns of work and wage labour, while local employers and house-dwellers were expected to welcome them in the streets and workplaces. Given the antipathy which existed towards the Gypsies in nineteenth century Britain, a feature that was evident also in Hoyland's own work, such hopes were optimistic. However, the scheme indicates that, like Grellmann, Hoyland was attached to a cultural view of the Gypsies and was convinced that it was possible to raise them above their existing condition.

Not all commentators of the Gypsies followed Grellmann so unquestioningly. Indeed, another Sheffield born investigator, Samuel Roberts (1765-1848), a contemporary of Hoyland who campaigned on a variety of social issues during his life time, wrote a number of books on the Gypsies which illustrated a contrasting viewpoint. However, although Roberts's interpretation of the Gypsies differed from that of his predecessor, he too was responsible for contributing to the accumulating mass of misinformation about the group, based largely upon a combination of unaccountable sources, speculation and fantasy.

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<sup>32</sup> Hoyland, *A Historical Survey of the Customs, Habits and present state of the Gypsies*, p. 215.

Like Grellmann and Hoyland, Roberts provided a written account of the history of the Gypsies and placed great emphasis on identifying a country of origin, which he claimed was most likely to be Egypt rather than India. Roberts had little real evidence to support his interpretation which was based largely upon biblical references.<sup>33</sup> However, like his predecessors, he drew upon the idea of the European Gypsies as an unvarying people, sharing identical physical and behavioural characteristics, in support of his theory of their single origin:

Such a people ... being in every country the same, with the same complexion, with so similar a cast of features – *especially of the eyes* – that a pure Gypsey may at once be known to be such, while it is said that there is a great resemblance of their skulls to those of Egyptian mummies.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, although Roberts favoured Egypt as the country of origin for the Gypsies and preferred to rely on prophecy rather than linguistics as his supporting evidence, his work followed in the same tradition as that of Grellmann and Hoyland, in presenting the Gypsies as a monolithic group.

In other respects, Roberts's position on the Gypsies represented the opposite extreme to that of Grellmann and Hoyland. Far from emphasising the depraved character of the Gypsies, their idleness, insanitary habits and criminal tendencies, he endeavoured to exonerate the group from the crimes of which they were so often accused. Roberts considered the accusations made against the Gypsies by scholars such as Grellmann to be '...exaggerated, misrepresented, and multiplied by prejudice

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<sup>33</sup> S. Roberts, *The Jew, the English Poor and the Gypsies; With A Proposal for the Important Improvement in the British Constitution*, London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1848. p. 44-45.

<sup>34</sup> Roberts, *The Jew, the English Poor and the Gypsies*, p. 52.

and inhumanity'.<sup>35</sup> By contrast, he claimed that the Gypsies were a steady, sober and reflecting people, 'more sinned against than sinning'.<sup>36</sup> In fact, he argued that the Gypsies were '...far more intelligent and civilised than the depraved part of the lower ranks in large towns'.<sup>37</sup> And, that the scapegoating of the group by sedentary society was responsible for their unfortunate reputation. In treating the Gypsies as rogues and vagabonds, Roberts believed that the sedentary public did its best to keep them this way.<sup>38</sup>

However, Roberts felt unable to contradict many of the charges against the Gypsies outright and argued instead that there existed many '...rogues and vagabonds of the worst description impersonating Gipsies, and often passing for them' and that the greater crimes had been committed by that description of vagrant.<sup>39</sup> This approach has accurately been termed an example of 'evangelic romanticism'.<sup>40</sup> In expressing such ideas as a missionary during the 1830s and 1840s, Robert's stance was unconventional. However, his work provides early evidence of a tendency which was to become increasingly prominent after the mid-nineteenth century. In later years, the inclination to exonerate the Gypsies from the charges laid at their door in antipathetic

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<sup>35</sup> S. Roberts, *Parallel Miracles; or, the Jew and the Gypsies*. London: J. Nisbet, 1830. p. 770.

<sup>36</sup> Roberts, *Parallel Miracles; or, the Jew and the Gypsies*, p. 770.

<sup>37</sup> S. Roberts, *The Gypsies: Their Origin, Continuance and Destination*, London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green and Longman, 1836. p. 81.

<sup>38</sup> C. Holmes, "Samuel Roberts and the Gypsies" in S. Pollard and C. Holmes (eds) *Essays in the Economic and Social History of South Yorkshire*, Sheffield: South Yorkshire Press, 1976. p. 235. Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth Century Society*, p. 101.

<sup>39</sup> S. Roberts, *Parallel Miracles; or, the Jew and the Gypsies*, p. 74.

<sup>40</sup> Holmes, "Samuel Roberts and the Gypsies", p. 242.



accounts was to become increasingly prevalent and can be discerned in the work of evangelists, novelists, scholars and others.<sup>41</sup>

Despite his sympathy with the social position of the Gypsies, like Grellmann and Hoyland before him, Roberts called for action to end their nomadic way of life. Indeed, in 1830 he dedicated his *Parallel Miracles*, to the British and Foreign Bible Society in the hope of drawing its attention to the cause of the Gypsies. However, his proposals differed from those of his predecessors, reflecting his more humanitarian outlook. Whereas Hoyland had called for the children of the Gypsies to be placed in charitable institutions, Roberts considered that more information was required on the group and that, in any case, they should be exposed to the Christian religion as one of love.<sup>42</sup> Roberts opposed aggressive tactics and called for their existing culture to be respected. However, he remained anxious that they should be converted to Christianity and induced to forsake the nomadic way of life.

In the years following the publication of the work of Hoyland and Roberts a number of missionary schemes were established in Britain with a view to raising the Gypsies above their existing condition.<sup>43</sup> Among these evangelists, Roberts never achieved the prominence of Hoyland, or the same degree of influence, a fact, which, testifies to the harsh and single-minded attitudes of many reformers. However, the work of Hoyland proved extremely influential and two of the most significant reformers, who embarked on schemes for the reformation of the Gypsies, James

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<sup>41</sup> See below.

<sup>42</sup> Holmes, "Samuel Roberts and the Gypsies", p. 237.

<sup>43</sup> Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth Century Society*, ch. 5.

Crabb and John Baird, were indebted to his work. Following in the tradition of Grellmann, Hoyland and Roberts, these figures also wrote detailed accounts of the state in which they claimed to have found the Gypsies and called for action to be taken to alleviate their condition.

James Crabb (1774-1851) was a Methodist preacher who devoted his life to the conversion of others. Before he turned his attention to the Gypsies he had already spent time working among other marginal groups including the poor, prostitutes, sailors and fisherman around Southampton, Romsey, Kingsland and Itching Ferry.<sup>44</sup> The importance which Crabb attached to his work among these groups stemmed from his concern over their spiritual and moral well-being, although he also sought to rescue them from the physical degeneracy and squalor which he associated with their moral condition.<sup>45</sup> Crabb turned his attention to the Gypsies in 1827 and his work among them was consistent with his earlier work. The minister made daily visits to the Gypsy camps and, like his predecessors, wrote an account of his work, which presented the group in an unflattering light. His book *The Gipsies' Advocate* was dedicated to judges, magistrates and ministers, reflecting his aspiration for action to be taken by those in authority to bring about the reformation of the group.<sup>46</sup>

Crabb considered that knowledge of the character, manners and habits of the

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<sup>44</sup> Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth Century Society*, p. 105.

<sup>45</sup> Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth Century Society*, p. 105.

<sup>46</sup> J. Crabb, *The Gipsies' Advocate Or Observations On The Origin, Character, Manners And Habits, Of The English Gipsies: To Which Are Added Many Interesting Anecdotes On The Success That Has Attended The Plans Of Several Benevolent Individuals Who Anxiously Desire Their Conversion To God*, London, (first published 1831), 1832 edn with additions.

Gypsies was more important than knowledge about their historical descent. Nevertheless he devoted a chapter of his book to speculation on the origin of the Gypsies, in which he followed Grellmann and Hoyland in asserting that they had migrated from India.<sup>47</sup> Crabb developed his theory by presenting a uniform model of the physical appearance, behaviour and moral characteristics of the group. However, although he wrote of the Gypsies as a singular people, Crabb's opposition related to their way of life and in particular their nomadic habits rather than any concern about their biological inheritance. Throughout his work Crabb emphasised the Gypsies' ignorance of religion.<sup>48</sup> He also wrote of their dirtiness, idleness and vanity and the poverty, hardship and deprivation they endured.<sup>49</sup> Such a people, he argued, required the urgent attention of missionaries owing to their '...unsettled habits, their disposition to evil practices, and that ignorance of true religion'.<sup>50</sup> The attention of missionaries, he considered, could bring about an improvement in their condition.

Although Crabb was single-minded in his condemnation of the nomadic way of life and the evils he associated with it, he did not present his readers with a wholesale character assassination of the Gypsies as a group. He considered that, to an extent, their reputation as thieves, poachers and outlaws was undeserved:

Indeed it has been too much the custom to impute them a great number of crimes of which they either never were guilty, or which could only be committed by an inconsiderable portion of their race.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Crabb, *The Gipsies' Advocate*, p. 13.

<sup>48</sup> Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth Century Society*, p. 107.

<sup>49</sup> Crabb, *The Gipsies' Advocate*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>50</sup> Crabb, *The Gipsies' Advocate*, pp. 64.

<sup>51</sup> Crabb, *The Gipsies' Advocate*, pp. 49.

He also argued that the accusations frequently made against them for kidnapping were often proven to be false.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, the Gypsies were not without praiseworthy characteristics and Crabb wrote with admiration of how even those Gypsies not married in accordance with the Christian religion remained faithful to one another.<sup>53</sup>

Thus, there is a degree of departure evident in the work of Crabb from the earlier accounts of Grellmann and Hoyland. However, unlike Roberts, Crabb did not relate the discrepancy between his own observations and those of his predecessors, to inaccuracies in the work of the earlier writers. Instead, he adopted two arguments through which he endeavoured to reconcile his own belief that the Gypsies were often wrongly accused of crimes, with earlier views on the inherent criminality of the group. Firstly, like Roberts, who it will be recalled, argued that the Gypsies were a more admirable group than other members of the nomadic population, Crabb argued that ‘...many persons pass for Gipsies who are not’.<sup>54</sup> And that, through intermarriage with the Gypsies, these individuals ‘become the means of leading them to crimes they would not have thought of but for their connection with such wicked people’.<sup>55</sup> Secondly, he drew distinctions between the English Gypsies and those who resided elsewhere in Europe:

Whoever has read Grellmann’s Dissertation on the Continental Gipsies, and supposes that those of England are

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<sup>52</sup> Crabb, *The Gipsies’ Advocate*, pp. 56.

<sup>53</sup> Crabb, *The Gipsies’ Advocate*, p. 33.

<sup>54</sup> Crabb, *The Gipsies’ Advocate*, p. 49.

<sup>55</sup> Crabb, *The Gipsies’ Advocate*, p. 49.

equally immoral and vicious, are greatly mistaken. The former are a banditti of robbers, without natural affection, living with each other almost like brutes, and scarcely knowing, and assuredly never caring about, the existence of God; some of them are even supposed to be cannibals. The Gipsies of this country are altogether different; as monstrous crimes are seldom heard of among them.<sup>56</sup>

In scapegoating both the Continental Gypsies and other members of the nomadic population in Britain for the crimes which Grellmann laid at the door of all Gypsies, Crabb contradicted his earlier assumption that the European Gypsies shared particular behavioural and moral characteristics. However, despite this contradiction, the arguments which Crabb presented were to become important. Over the following century, the idea that there existed some kind of hierarchy among the nomadic people, whereby some were physically and morally superior to others, came increasingly to shape commentaries on the group.<sup>57</sup>

Despite Crabb's willingness to accept that the British Gypsies were more admirable than other wanderers, he called ultimately for the abolition of the nomadic way of life. In 1827 a committee was established in Southampton 'to take into serious consideration, without loss of time, the peculiar habits, character and condition of the forlorn Gipseys; and to adopt such measures as might be considered best calculated to promote their general improvement'.<sup>58</sup> The Committee set up a sub-committee to gather information on the Gypsies and, as a result of their investigations, Crabb

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<sup>56</sup> Crabb, *The Gipsies' Advocate*, p. 49.

<sup>57</sup> See below.

<sup>58</sup> Quotation cited in Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth Century Society*, p. 105, from the *Southampton Committee: A Summary Account of the Proceedings of a Provisional Committee Associated at Southampton with a view to the Consideration and Improvement of the Condition of the Gipseys*. (Southampton, c 1830).

produced a plan for bringing an end to the nomadic way of life. In his proposals he preferred to avoid suggestions of force. However, he emphasised the importance of working among the Gypsy children and advocated the voluntary separation of parent and child.<sup>59</sup> With the help of the Southampton Committee, he went on to spend years attempting to reform the Gypsies to the ways of settled society. The Committee was successful in gaining both moral and financial support for its work and a number of missionary agents were appointed in their pay. Although the Committee's missionary efforts remained relatively localised, Crabb's account of the Gypsies and his activities among them proved influential in Britain and he became a key influence on future generations of missionaries.<sup>60</sup>

A further missionary to the Gypsies who contributed to existing ideas about the group and requires consideration here is the Reverend John Baird (1799-1861), who spent the last thirty years of his life working among the Gypsies of Kirk Yetholm in Roxburghshire, where he served as parish minister. Although there were a number of other missionaries working among the British Gypsies during the same period, some of whom similarly wrote accounts of the people, the work of Baird is particularly important.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, his ideas on the Gypsies were to be a key influence in informing attitudes towards the group and shaping schemes to bring about their

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<sup>59</sup> Crabb, *The Gipsies' Advocate*, pp. 75-77.

<sup>60</sup> The attitudes of employees of the London City Mission Society who worked among the Gypsies in the metropolitan area during the second half of the nineteenth century reveals Crabb's influence. See chapter four. See also Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth Century Society*, pp. 108-109.

<sup>61</sup> For examples of other missionaries working among the British Gypsies during the nineteenth century see Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth Century Society*, ch 5. For a further account of the work a nineteenth century missionary to the Gypsies see S. Alder, *Work among the Gipsies. Being an Account of Twelve Years Missionary Work*, Chobham: Medhurst and Co, 1893.

reformation during the early twentieth century.<sup>62</sup>

Baird relied heavily on the work of his predecessors in forming his ideas on the Gypsies. For example, his own short account of his work among the group entitled *The Scottish Gipsy's Advocate*, reflected the influence of Crabb's earlier volume. He too, argued that the Gypsies were of Indian origin and could be found everywhere the same:

Wherever these people exist, whether in England, in India, or any of the intervening countries, they are found to resemble each other in customs, manners, habits, character, features, and language.<sup>63</sup>

When Baird wrote of the shared manners, habits and character of the Gypsies he painted an intensely negative picture. Hence, in reference to the work of Crabb, he argued that the Scottish Gypsies were 'equally low in the scale of humanity with their brethren on the other side of the border'.<sup>64</sup> Baird perceived the Gypsies as what he called a parasitic race; engaging in pilfering poaching and other dishonest practices: '...they are a set of idle, worthless, unprofitable vagabonds, with very few redeeming qualities'.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, he added, they posed a danger to sedentary society:

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<sup>62</sup> The influence of the work of Baird on the approach taken to the Gypsies by the Scottish churches during the early twentieth century is discussed in chapter four.

<sup>63</sup> J. Baird, *The Scottish Gipsy's Advocate; Being A Short Account of the Gipsies of Kirk-Yetholm in Connection with A Plan Proposed to Be Adopted For the Improvement of the Gipsy Population of Scotland*, Edinburgh: John Lindsay, 1839. p. 5. See also W. Baird, *Memoir of John Baird Minister of Yetholm*, London: Nesbit, 1862.

<sup>64</sup> Baird, *The Scottish Gipsy's Advocate*, p. iii.

<sup>65</sup> J. Baird, in *First report of the Committee for the Reformation of the Gipsies in Scotland*, Edinburgh: Thomas Constable, 1840. p. 3. Whether Baird employed the term 'race' as a cultural or biological classification is uncertain. However, his use of the term is unsophisticated and he did not draw upon complex scientific theory.

‘Everywhere they are distinguished as a fierce and lawless race, wandering in hordes or bands dangerous to society...and useless to the community in which they live’.<sup>66</sup>

Baird shared Crabb’s aspirations for bringing about the reformation of the Gypsies. Like his predecessors, he perceived this reform not only in terms of inducing the group to accept Christianity but encouraging them to forsake the nomadic way of life and to adopt sedentary patterns of work and wage labour. Baird called for legislation which would bring about such changes by restraining and prohibiting the wandering propensities of the Gypsies. However, he stopped short of advocating harsh and repressive measures and emphasised instead the need to show the Gypsies the evils of the wandering life. Thus his scheme also included complementary policies of instruction and encouragement to aid the Gypsies in their transition to a settled life-style.<sup>67</sup>

A Committee on the Reformation for the Gypsies in Scotland was established and Baird was charged with drawing up a plan for their reformation. Though he believed that legislation would be the most effective means through which to facilitate this end, he accepted that, in its absence, the nomads should be encouraged to forsake their way of life through education and religious instruction. Those who could not be persuaded to settle, should be encouraged to board out their children. In this way Baird hoped the children could be prevented from following the habits of their parents. Following the scheme advocated by Hoyland, he aimed to help

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<sup>66</sup> Baird, *The Scottish Gipsy’s Advocate*, p 7.

<sup>67</sup> Baird, *The Scottish Gipsy’s Advocate*, p 8.



boys find a suitable trade and to place girls in domestic service.<sup>68</sup>

The work of these early commentators on the Gypsies, illustrates a remarkable degree of consistency. The prevailing view was that the Gypsies across the Continent were a uniform people who shared distinct physical and behavioural traits and could be found everywhere the same. Yet despite their emphasis on the singular country of origin of the Gypsies, whether India or Egypt, all these writers adopted a cultural rather than a biological understanding of the group. The writers laid down proposals which they believed would lead to the reformation of the Gypsies, reflecting the idea that their characteristics were not grounded in nature but could be altered through socialisation. It was considered that this would be a difficult process, hence, the belief that the wandering propensities of the adult were too deeply ingrained for change and the emphasis on the reformation of the children. Yet, nevertheless, the overriding conviction was that reform could be achieved.

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The images of the Gypsies which have hitherto been considered remained prominent throughout the nineteenth and in many cases into the twentieth century. However, around the mid-nineteenth century a further seemingly contradictory stereotype of the Gypsy came to have an increasing impact on perceptions of the group. The romantic Gypsy stereotype was informed by the work of earlier writers associated with the Romantic Movement. During the late eighteenth and early

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<sup>68</sup> Baird, *The Scottish Gipsy's Advocate*, p. 8.

nineteenth century many novelists, artists and poets had expressed their fears of the onslaught of industrialisation. Romantics such as William Blake were repelled by industrial capitalism and a distinct sentiment developed against the furious pursuit of profit which had accompanied the industrial revolution.<sup>69</sup> The expression of such concerns was paralleled by an upsurge in interest in rural life and the countryside. There was a belief that the countryside was disappearing and in some circles this assessment was accompanied by a wish to return to a simple *al fresco* life, pure, free and closer to nature.<sup>70</sup> In the work of a number of middle class scholars and artists, the stereotype of the Gypsy was metamorphasised into a symbol of the simple life for which many now yearned. And, by the mid-nineteenth century such images began to impact upon perceptions of Gypsies at every level of society. This change in the portrayal of the Gypsy had little to do with any objective changes in Gypsy culture. In fact, the changing portrayal of the Gypsy had far more to do with the self-perception of the British bourgeoisie than the Gypsies themselves.

The most influential example of this portrayal of the Gypsy during the nineteenth century can be found in the work of George Henry Borrow (1803-1881). Borrow's work spanned various genres. His first book approached the Gypsies in a manner comparable to that of Grellmann. However, two later novels *Lavengro* and *Romany Rye*, described at the time of publication as 'semi autobiographical',

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<sup>69</sup> See for example W. Howitt, *The Rural Life of England*, 2nd ed, London: Longman, Orme, 1840, pp. 166-8. and E. Lytton, *The Life, Letters and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton*, 2 Vols, London: Kegan Paul, 1883. Vol. I. pp. 227-228.

<sup>70</sup> T. Ashcroft, *English Art and English Society*, London: Peter Davies, 1936. p. 64. During this period a vast number of poems, plays and novels which dealt with the theme of Gypsies, beggars and vagrants. These include John Brome's play *The Jovial Crew* (1641) and Burn's poem *The Jolly Beggars* (1785). The volume of such literature continued to grow throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. This trend is also reflected on the stage. The operetta *The Gypsy Baron* by Johann Strauss II was first performed in 1885 and was frequently revived on stage during the period under investigation.

presented the reader with an indistinguishable blend of personal observation and fantasy.<sup>71</sup> Borrow's last book *Romano Lavo Lil*, or Gypsy word book, included a series of anecdotes from the English Gypsies and followed Grellmann in his emphasis on language.<sup>72</sup> Borrow, who undertook work for the British and Foreign Bible Society, also had an interest in spreading Christianity among the Gypsies and became involved in translating biblical texts into the Romani language. However, unlike the evangelicals whose work among the Gypsies has already been considered, Borrow did not call for the Gypsies to be encouraged to give up their nomadic habits or adopt the ways of settled society.

There were some similarities between the work of Borrow and that of earlier commentaries on the Gypsies. Borrow presented the Gypsies as an unchanging group, and, surprisingly perhaps, he too was negative about their past, referring to them as a '...people of savage ancestry'.<sup>73</sup> He remained open to ideas about their participation in theft and fraud and seemed to regard them as a species of animal rather than as human beings.<sup>74</sup> He even went as far as to suggest that cannibalism may have been prevalent among the Gypsies in ancient times, although he accepted that many such accusations against the Gypsies had been falsified.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> G. Borrow, *Lavengro*, London: Blackie and Son, ( first published 1851), 1951 edn. pp. 101, 342-351. See also G. Borrow, *The Romany Rye*, London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1857.

<sup>72</sup> G. Borrow, *Romano Lavo-Lil: Word Book of the Romany or, English Gypsy Language with Specimens of Gypsy Poetry and an Account of Certain Gypsies or Places Inhabited by them and of various things relating to Gypsy Life in England*, London: Murray, ( first published 1873) 1905 edn.

<sup>73</sup> G. Borrow, *The Zincali: An Account of the Gypsies of Spain. With an original collection of their songs and poetry, and a copious Dictionary of their Language*, London: Murray, 1841. p. 246.

<sup>74</sup> Borrow, *The Zincali*, pp. 2-3. See also C. Ribton-Turner, *A History of Vagrants and Vagrancy and Beggars and Begging*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1887. p. 496. Ripton-Turner, takes his evidence from Borrow and argues that: 'They everywhere exhibit the same tendencies and hunt for their bread by the same means as if they were not of the human race, but rather of an animal species'.

<sup>75</sup> Borrow, *The Zincali*, p. 81-83.

At times indeed, Borrow presented his readers with detail similar to that in Grellmann. One such likeness is provided by Mrs Herne, a character in his allegedly autobiographical work *Lavengro*. She, we are led to believe, poisoned Borrow for fear he had discovered the innermost secrets of her people. Whether or not she was drawn from life, must remain a matter for speculation. However, Mrs Herne served to reinforce the negative image, of the ageing Gypsy woman, as a sorceress capable of great evil. This stereotype is a stark contrast to Borrow's portrayal of the young Gypsy woman, who though fickle, is both beautiful and seductive. The discrepancy between the two images emphasises the way in which the Gypsy woman was believed to be deceptive. Behind the masquerade of beauty of the young Gypsy woman exists the old crone.<sup>76</sup>

However, although there were parallels between the work of Borrow and Grellmann, the former, on the whole, preferred to paint a far more romantic picture of the Gypsies. He presented them as children of the open air living in harmony with nature. On encountering a group of Gypsy men on horseback in *Lavengro* he compared them to 'gulls on the waves' and described one rider as a '...man with a countenance heroically beautiful, but wild, wild, wild'.<sup>77</sup> Elsewhere he wrote: 'The race of the Rommany is by nature perhaps the most beautiful in the world'.<sup>78</sup> Just as

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<sup>76</sup> A parallel to this image of the changing appearance of the Gypsy woman can be found in scientific disciplines. For example, Cesare Lombroso studied prostitutes and employed an almost poetic description of their change from beautiful young woman to old hag. See N. Harrowitz, *Antisemitism, Misogyny and the Logic of Criminal Difference. Cesare Lombroso and Matildi Serao*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1952. p. 33.

<sup>77</sup> G. Borrow, *Lavengro*, p. 211.

<sup>78</sup> Borrow, *The Zincali*, p. 4. Spelling as in original.

the ideas of his predecessor Grellmann had been caught up in the rumours circulating about Gypsy cannibalism, Borrow's work was heavily influenced by the Romantic Movement. In tune with the feelings of those who feared the disappearance of the countryside, Borrow argued that the 'true' Gypsy, the last remaining link between the English man and his past, was also rapidly vanishing.<sup>79</sup>

Borrow presented himself as having a unique insight into the life of the Gypsy due to his instinctive understanding of the group. He claimed that such was his relationship with the Gypsies that they referred to him as the 'Romany Rye' or Gypsy gentleman.<sup>80</sup> Indeed he used the character of Mrs Herne as a literary device in order to emphasise his unique and even dangerous intimacy. In reality, Borrow told little about the people themselves. Instead, throughout his work he generalised about their romantic way of life. The result was the presentation of an elusive and mythical figure drawn from a combination of unaccountable sources and the author's own fantasy.<sup>81</sup>

It is likely that Borrow's interest in emphasising his privileged position among the Gypsies, and through this his authority on the subject, stemmed from his personal feelings of insecurity as a scholar and his intention to safeguard himself from criticism rather than from any streak of arrogance. However, Borrow projected himself as a leading authority on the Gypsies, and the veil of mystery shrouding his work enabled him to become an authority in the field despite the reality of his limited

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<sup>79</sup> Borrow, *The Zincali*, p. 25-26 lists the reasons he considers to be responsible for the decline of the Gypsies and p. 29 argues that Gypsies are in decline in both England and Spain. See also Willems, *In Search of the True Gypsy*, pp. 94-95.

<sup>80</sup> Borrow, *Lavengro*, pp. 101, 342-351. See also Borrow, *The Romany Rye*,

<sup>81</sup> See Mayall, *Gypsy Travellers in Nineteenth Century Society*, p. 72. Mayall considers the work of Borrow within a section of his book dealing with fiction.

capacity as a scholar coupled with his unwillingness to prove how far his experience of the Gypsies extended outside his own fantasy.<sup>82</sup> Borrow's determination to emphasise his authority on matters relating to the Gypsies led him in the course of his work to be critical of writers of Gypsy fiction. He was said to have complained that:

[Matthew] Arnold had no conception of the Romany temper,  
and that no gypsy could sympathise with it, or even understand  
its motive in the least degree.<sup>83</sup>

The idea of the Gypsies as an elusive people prepared only to divulge their secrets to the most privileged of outsiders was irresistible to many writers who followed Borrow and similar claims were made by other Gypsy scholars throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Although, similar images of romantic wanderers can be found in the work of more prominent writers such as Arnold, Browning, Keats, Elliott and Meredith, it was Borrow who became the key influence on succeeding generations of Gypsy scholars. As a result, by the early twentieth century some admirers had given him 'an undisputed and permanent place among the greater writers of the Victorian era'.<sup>84</sup> The influence of Borrow and his authority among scholars was given added weight by the speculation surrounding his own Gypsy ancestry.<sup>85</sup> Even his biographer Dearden,

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<sup>82</sup> Willems, *In Search of the True Gypsy*, pp. 105-109 provides evidence to suggest that his experiences are exaggerated in nature and extent with the possibility that some of his claims may have been fabricated, although Willems does not seriously challenge that Borrow did have some acquaintance with Gypsies.

<sup>83</sup> J. Douglas, *Theodore Watt-Dunton*, London: Hodder and Stroughton, 1904. p. 108.

<sup>84</sup> Cited in H. Milford, *Borrow: Selections with Essays*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924. p. 8.

<sup>85</sup> This speculation was effectively brought to a conclusion by an article, illustrating that Borrow had no known Gypsy ancestry. A. Fraser, "George Borrow's Birthplace and Gypsy Ancestry" in *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, Vol. 51, 1972. pp. 60-81. Prior to this work a number of writers had speculated about or attempted to prove Borrow's Gypsy ancestry. See B. Versey-Fitzgerald, *Gypsy Borrow*, London: Dobson, 1953. The author had also tried to substantiate his assumption that George Borrow was a Gypsy in his *Gypsies of Britain: An Introduction to their History*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1944. p. xv.

who was by no means blind to the fantastical nature of Borrow's writings, could not resist speculating with reference to the author's upbringing that he '...might indeed, have been the child of one of those gypsies with which the regiment constantly rubbed shoulders on the road'.<sup>86</sup> As is the case with Grellmann, the influence of Borrow's work can be discerned in Black's bibliography in which several pages were devoted to listing the numerous editions of his work.<sup>87</sup> Such was Borrow's authority, in fact, that traces of his influence can be found even today.<sup>88</sup>

Borrow's understanding of the Gypsies represents a departure from the work of earlier commentators on the group not only because of its attachment to a romantic perception, but also because it provides an early glimpse of an understanding of the Gypsies informed by biology. An indication of this understanding is evident in Borrow's *The Zincali*, where intermixing with the sedentary population is presented as one of a number of reasons for the decline of the Gypsies.<sup>89</sup> It is unclear in *The Zincali* whether Borrow considers this decline to be racial, cultural or moral in

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<sup>86</sup> S. Dearden, *The Gypsy Gentleman: A Study of George Borrow*, London: Arthur Baker, 1939. p. 5.

<sup>87</sup> Black, *A Gypsy Bibliography*, p. 21. See also T. Wise, *A Bibliography of the Writings in Prose and Verse of George Henry Borrow*, London: Dawson, 1966.

<sup>88</sup> See W. Scott, *Guy Mannering or the Astrologer*, London: John C Nimmo, 1896. See also M. Allott (ed.), *The Poems of John Keats*, Longman: London, 1970. P. Bartlett, (ed) *The Poems of George Meredith*, Vol. 2, London: Yale University Press, 1978. G. Elliott, *The Mill on the Floss*, London: Dent, (first published 1860) 1966 edn. I. Jack, (ed), *Browning: Poetic Works 1833-1864*, London: Oxford University press, 1970. M. Forman, (ed), *The Letters of John Keats*, Vol I, Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1931. R. Stange, (ed), *The Poetic Works of Robert Browning*, Houghton Mifflin Company: Boston, 1974. The idea of the Gypsies as an elusive people is also reflected in a chapter on the early history of Gypsies in Europe in A. Fraser, *The Gypsies*, is entitled "The Great Trick" as though measures taken by such groups in order to escape persecution were somehow illustrative of a spirited attempt to deceive.

<sup>89</sup> Borrow, *The Zincali*, pp. 25-26.

character. However, his portrayal of the so-called 'half and halves' in his other writings indicate that he did believe that the off-spring of inter-marriages between Gypsies and non-Gypsies were less desirable both in terms of physical appearance and moral character than their pure Gypsy ancestors. In Borrow's work the reader is introduced to a number of characters who are differentiated from other Gypsies because of their status as half-breeds. For example, the reader is informed that the 'flamin tinman' is a 'half and half', having been born to a Gypsy father and non-Gypsy mother. The tinman is presented as being less admirable than other, purer blooded Gypsy characters. Indeed, he is referred to as 'the biggest rogue in England'.<sup>90</sup> In Borrow, suggestions of an understanding of the Gypsies as a biological defined race are, at most, hazy. However, his work provides early evidence of a trend which was to increase after the mid-nineteenth century.

Although it has been possible to consider the work of Borrow in the context of early and unsophisticated biological ideas about race, the perception of the Gypsies as a biologically defined group, distinct both from the sedentary population and other nomads was marginal during this period. Indeed, in many commentaries, the Gypsies were lumped together with all nomadic people, as a collective nuisance group. The work of journalist Henry Mayhew (1812-1887) is particularly illustrative of this tendency to write of the broad nomadic population as a unified whole. In fact, Mayhew divided humanity into two 'distinct and broadly marked races...the wanderers and the settlers - the vagabonds and the citizens - the nomadic and the civilised tribes'.<sup>91</sup> Within his category of 'vagabonds' Mayhew referred not merely to

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<sup>90</sup> Borrow, *Lavengro*, Vol. III, 1851 p. 10.

<sup>91</sup> H. Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, (1881) (ed) John D Rosenberg, New York:



Gypsies but to tramps, street sellers, fiddlers and beggars whom he considered to be a 'race apart'. This sweeping definition was based predominantly on the occupations of the groups; a cultural rather than a biological understanding of the term 'race'.<sup>92</sup> In this sense the term 'race' was often used as a means of drawing social or economic distinctions between different sectors of society. There was a tendency among those who drew up such divisions to place the different groups they identified into a hierarchical model and indeed Mayhew's account emphasised the inferiority of the nomads from the sedentary population. In his study of *London Labour and the London Poor*, (1861), Mayhew wrote:

The nomad then is distinguished from the civilised man by his response to regular and continuous labour - by his want of providence in laying up store for the future - by his inability to perceive consequences ever so slightly removed from immediate apprehension - by his passion for stupefying herbs and roots, and, when possible, for intoxicating fermented liquors - by his extraordinary powers of enduring privation - by his comparative insensibility to pain - by his immoderate love of gaming, frequently wishing his own personal liberty upon a single cast - by his love of libidinous dances - by the pleasures he experiences in witnessing the suffering of sentient creatures - by his delight in warfare and all perilous sports - by the looseness of his notions as to property- by the absence of chastity among his women and his disregard of female honour - and lastly by his vague sense of religion - his rude idea of a Creator, and utter absence of all appreciation on the mercy of the divine spirit.<sup>93</sup>

Mayhew projected onto the nomad all that was considered unacceptable to British society. His work placed the wanderers in direct opposition to the values of industry, thrift, sobriety, peace, chastity and religion, those increasingly important virtues which

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Dover, 1968. Vol. 1. p. 1. Much of Mayhew's work which appeared in this volume had been published earlier in his articles in the *Morning Chronicle* during the 1850s.

<sup>92</sup> Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians*, p. 23.

<sup>93</sup> Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, p. 2. See also K. Malik, *The Meaning of Race*,

came to the fore in Victorian England. The work does not, however, provide evidence of a biological understanding of the Gypsies.

Elsewhere, however, there is further evidence of an understanding of the Gypsies as a biologically defined race. Such testimony can be gleaned from the work of Walter Simson, whose *A History of the Gipsies*, was published in 1865 and his son James Simson who wrote a number of tracts on the Gypsies.<sup>94</sup> Walter Simson followed Grellmann and attempted to offer a comprehensive historical study of the Gypsies. Simson was influenced by the increasing interest which European anthropologists, ethnologists and linguists were beginning to take in those living outside Europe and perceived his own interest in the Gypsies to be part of this broader trend:

When we have the manners and customs of every savage tribe hitherto discovered, including even the Hottentots and Abyssinians, described in grave publications by adventurous travellers, I can see no reason why there should not be preserved, and exhibited for the inspection of the public, the manners and customs of a barbarous race that have lived so long on our own doors...<sup>95</sup>

Unlike earlier writers, the Simsons considered that a person did not cease to be a Gypsy merely by a change in habit. They accepted that instances of inter-marriage with the sedentary British were high and the descendants of such unions were often indistinguishable from the wider population. However, they argued that a person with Gypsy ancestry, however distant, possessed a mysterious affinity to the Gypsy tribe. James Simson wrote:

The blood however, crossed or re-crossed, 'comes-up' in the Gypsy *mental feeling*, especially through the female line, with

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London: Macmillan, 1996. p. 94-95.

<sup>94</sup> W. Simson, *A History of the Gipsies*, London: Sampson Low and Co, 1865.

<sup>95</sup> Simson, *A History of the Gipsies*, p. 260.

the peculiarities that accompanies it, viz., its possessor is a part of the Gipsy tribe.<sup>96</sup>

There is a contradiction in the work of James Simson in that while he expressed the idea that the Gypsies' behaviour was grounded in nature, he also argued that the church had to take up the responsibility of reforming the Gypsies by raising them '...in humanity in the religious, moral and social aspects...'.<sup>97</sup> This confusion highlights the lack of consistency and sophistication in Simson's use of theories of heredity. His understanding of such ideas is vague and his use of them imprecise. Yet, nevertheless, his work provides early evidence of the way in which biological theories of race which were being developed in scientific circles came to inform the work of social commentators. By the late nineteenth century such ideas had become increasingly influential in shaping Gypsy stereotypes.

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The perception of the Gypsies as a separate biological race from the sedentary population and other members of the nomadic population was also evident in the work of those, in the later decades of the nineteenth century, who followed Borrow in his portrayal of the Gypsies as a romantic people. By the end of the century an increasing number of scholars had emerged who had developed an interest in Gypsies, having been inspired by the romantic image. In turn, these individuals added

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<sup>96</sup> J. Simson, *The Social Emancipation of the Gipsies: Especially those of Mixed Blood, and Resembling and Living like Other People. As Illustrated in Letters to the Church of England and the Three Scottish Presbyterian Churches, and in Letters, Addressees and Articles sent to the British Press and People Generally: Equally Applicable to America*, New York: E.O. Jenkins and Son, 1895. p. i. J. Simson, *Discussions on the Gipsies, John Bunyan and Mrs Carlyle*, New York: Edward Jenkins' Son, 1895.

<sup>97</sup> J. Simson, *The Scottish Churches and the Gipsies*, Edinburgh: Maclachlan, London: Baillere, Yndall

their own accounts of the group to the growing stack of works compiled by sedentary commentators. Of particular importance here is the work of the American academic Charles Godfrey Leland (1824-1903), the British, Francis Hindes Groome (1851-1902) and other scholars associated with the Gypsy Lore Society.

Despite his American roots the work of C. G. Leland is highly significant in tracing the development of ideas about the Gypsies in Britain. Not least, because he was involved in the formation of the Gypsy Lore Society in Britain and proved extremely influential during the first phase of its activities. The work of C. G. Leland followed Borrow in presenting the Gypsies as a mysterious and romantic people ‘...who live like the birds and hares, not of the house-born or the town-bred, but free and at home only with nature’.<sup>98</sup> He shared Borrow’s fear that, just as the countryside was being swallowed up by the towns, the Gypsies too, were rapidly vanishing. He warned that ‘The day is coming when there will be no more...wild wanderers, no wild nature, and certainly no gypsies’.<sup>99</sup> Leland also followed Borrow in his belief that the Gypsies closely guarded information about their customs and language. He too was adamant that only the ‘Romany Rye’ with his special qualities and unique understanding of the Gypsies could obtain accurate information from them.<sup>100</sup> For his part, Leland claimed to have a great affinity with the so-called primitive races or children of nature. In a biographical study, his niece and fellow Gypsy lorist, Elizabeth Robins Pennell, wrote that: ‘He had always, he said, been able to win the

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and Cox, New York: Miller, 1881. p. 5.

<sup>98</sup> C. Leland, *The Gypsies*, London: Trübner and Company,

<sup>99</sup> Leland, *The Gypsies*, p. 15.

<sup>100</sup> Leland, *The Gypsies*, p. 11.

confidence of Indians and Negroes. It was natural then that he and the Gypsies, as soon as they met, should understand each other.'<sup>101</sup>

In other important respects, however, the work of Leland represents a departure from that of Borrow.<sup>102</sup> In particular, it illustrates the increasing influence of bio-scientific theories of race and racial hierarchy on commentators on the Gypsies. Leland's approach was deeply influenced by the prestige of science and in particular the disciplines of ethnology and anthropology.<sup>103</sup> As such, his work reflects the increasing interest within scientific circles of drawing the peoples of the world into distinct and impermeable categories. Indeed, one explanation given by Leland for his interest in the Gypsies was the fact that 'among all divisions of the human race only two: Gypsy and Jew have been apparently from the beginning set apart – ever living among others but reserved unto themselves.'<sup>104</sup> Thus, from the beginning he proceeded to isolate the characteristics which he believed differentiated the Gypsies from sedentary Europeans. This is not to say that Leland was engaged in sophisticated scientific theorising in his work on the Gypsies. However, his work reflects the increasing attempt by social commentators to give their work an aura of authority by invoking the language of scientific theories of race.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> E. Robins Pennell, *Charles Godfrey Leland. A Biography*. Vol. II. London: Archibald Constable and Co, 1906. p. 129.

<sup>102</sup> Many scholars who followed Borrow became sceptical about his books, particularly on the Romani language, but his influence on their own academic work is most apparent. In particular Borrow was criticised for his *Romano Lavo-Lil*,

<sup>103</sup> Leland, *The Gypsies*, p. 17-18. The broad interest in anthropology ethnology and also folk-lore during the second half of the nineteenth century was reflected by the development of a wide network of scholarly and semi-scholarly activity in this broad area. The London Anthropological Society was founded in 1863, the Folk-Lore Society in 1879 and the Folk Song Society in 1898.

<sup>104</sup> Leland, *The Gypsies*, p. 18

<sup>105</sup> For evidence of growing interest in race within scientific circles see M. Biddiss, *The Age of the Masses. Ideas and Society in Europe since 1870*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977. p. 115.

In his work on the Gypsies Leland faced a problem in that, for the romantic picture he painted to appear credible, he had to address the issue of the antipathetic images which were so prevalent throughout Europe. In other words, he had to reconcile such images with the more sentimental portrayal of the group presented in his own work. By way of explaining the discrepancy between the contradictory stereotypes of the Gypsy, Leland drew upon the language used by many scientists and social commentators who had an interest in biological theories of race. In particular, he presented the view that a process of racial degeneration was underway amongst the Gypsies. The idea that the Gypsies were undergoing some kind of decline was not in itself new. It will be remembered that Borrow had earlier expressed concerns about the disappearance of the true Gypsies.<sup>106</sup> However, whereas Borrow's ideas on the decline of the Gypsies took the form of a muddy combination of social, cultural, environmental and biological explanations, Leland's beliefs were expressed more clearly in terms of biological degeneracy caused by racial inter-mixing. He invoked the idea prevalent among many scientists of the late nineteenth century, that characteristics such as culture, behaviour and morality were determined by biological inheritance. He argued that the Gypsies were the descendants of various Indian tribes and as such shared common characteristics such as dark physical features, an ingrained wanderlust and an aversion to giving information about their language.<sup>107</sup> The proposition was then put forward that the Gypsies had once been, and in some cases still were, an admirable and romantic race of wanderers. However, Leland argued that these pure Gypsies were becoming scarce and that many nomads were

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<sup>106</sup> See above.

<sup>107</sup> Leland, *The Gypsies*, pp. 18-19 and 35.

frequently mistaken for Gypsies when in fact they were not pure Gypsies, but half-breeds or travellers with weak claims to genuine Gypsy blood.<sup>108</sup> Leland claimed that by intermixing with the lowest elements of the sedentary population, the Gypsies had lost the admirable characteristics of their wandering ancestors and thus become a tribe of half-breeds possessing the worst characteristics of their non-Gypsy forefathers.<sup>109</sup> These half-breeds he considered to have become a menace to society.

Leland's ideas on the racial degeneration of the Gypsies not only reflected broader trends in scientific interest but were also informed by the work of earlier writers who had attempted to exonerate the Gypsies. In the work of figures such as Samuel Roberts and, to a lesser extent, James Crabb, there had been a tendency to differentiate between different groups within the nomadic population and suggest that certain nomads were somehow more respectable than others.<sup>110</sup> Such arguments were invoked as a means of raising the Gypsies, or certain groups of Gypsies, above some of the more severe charges made by against them by figures such as Grellmann and Hoyland. In the same way, Leland's claims about the degeneration of the Gypsies were useful in that they enabled the negative stereotypes of the Gypsies to be reconciled with more romantic ideas.

The argument that a process of racial degeneration was underway among the Gypsies also enabled Leland to explain away any Gypsies who failed to conform to his own romantic ideal, in terms of 'half-breeds' who had lost the original

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<sup>108</sup> Leland, *The Gipsies*, p. 18

<sup>109</sup> C. Leland, "The Tinkers" in *JGLS*, NS, Vol. I, 1908. p. 81.

<sup>110</sup> See above.

characteristics of the Gypsy race. From the beginning he was adamant that it was possible to identify an honourable pure Gypsy from a half-breed of inferior blood. He wrote:

The Hawker whom you meet, and whose blue eyes and light hair indicate no trace of oriental blood may not be a ...half-blood... as a full Gypsy might contemptuously term him, but he may be a...quadroon or octagoon, or he may have been 'gipsified' by marrying a Gipsy wife...<sup>111</sup>

Leland's attempts to classify the Gypsies whom he encountered as half-breeds or full-blooded Gypsies were highly subjective. In one instance, when a nomad angered the scholar by referring to him as a 'Gorgio' or outsider, instead of the title 'Romany Rye', which he preferred, Leland was quick to proclaim that the individual was '...not of gypsy blood'.<sup>112</sup> On this occasion, Leland's belief in his unique relationship to the Gypsies influenced his classifications of individuals.

We can now turn to Francis Hindes Groome. He followed in much the same tradition as Leland, and also glowed with admiration for the image of the Gypsy which had been presented in the work of George Borrow. And, like Leland, Groome made a significant contribution to the development and increasing prominence of romantic ideas about the group, writing books, articles and encyclopaedia entries. In his *In Gipsy Tents* (1880), Groome's adherence to romantic images of the Gypsy is clear from the onset. In describing a Gypsy by the name of Silvanus Lavell he wrote:

A hale old man, he stands over six feet two: his merry nutbrown face is lighted up by dazzling teeth and a pair of glittering hazel eyes; his grizzling hair curls round the brim of a high-crowned ribbon-decked hat. A yellow silk neckerchief, brown velveteen coat with spade-guinea dittos, cord

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<sup>111</sup> Leland, *The Gipsies*, p. 18

<sup>112</sup> Leland, *The Gipsies*, p. 122.



breeches, and leathern leggins, make up his holiday attire; his left hand wields a silver-headed whalebone whip; and from a deep skirt-pocket peeps forth the unfailing violin.<sup>113</sup>

Like Leland, Groome was at pains to reconcile antipathetic charges against the Gypsies with his perception of the group as a romantic people. Indeed, echoing the words of Crabb, he argued that: ‘...whoever has read Grellmann’s Dissertation on the Continental Gypsies and supposes that those of England are equally immoral and vicious, is greatly mistaken’.<sup>114</sup> However, Groome also accepted the arguments advanced by Leland on the racial degeneration of the Gypsies caused by intermixing with the sedentary population and a subsequent decline in purity of blood. Like Leland, he too believed that such purity could be quantified and called for a census to be conducted of the nomadic population in Britain in order to determine the extent of blood purity among them.<sup>115</sup> The only criteria put forward by Groome for determining the blood purity of the Gypsies was linguistic. Indeed, he argued that language was ‘...the primary test of Gipsydom’.<sup>116</sup> However, any such criterias for determining blood-purity would have been extremely subjective.

Although the work of C. G. Leland and F. H. Groome earned them little respect among folklorists, this was not the case among those scholars who focused their attention on the Gypsies.<sup>117</sup> In fact, Leland and Groome were instrumental in the formation and first phase of the Gypsy Lore Society through which they went on to

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<sup>113</sup> F. Groome, *In Gipsy Tents*, Edinburgh: William P. Nimmo and Co, 1880. pp. 1-2.

<sup>114</sup> F. Groome, *The Gipsies, Reminiscence and Social Life of this Extraordinary Race*, Edinburgh, 1881. pp. 229 and 234.

<sup>115</sup> Groome, *In Gipsy Tents*, p. 249.

<sup>116</sup> Groome, *In Gipsy Tents*, p. 249.

<sup>117</sup> Willems, *In search of the True Gypsy*, p. 176.

have a huge influence on scholars who turned their attention to Gypsies during the early twentieth century.<sup>118</sup>

The Gypsy Lore Society, formed in 1888, owed much to Borrow's work, which had captured the imagination of early members.<sup>119</sup> The Society was formed when the British Gypsy scholar, David MacRitchie, who had given up his position as a qualified accountant in favour of intellectual work, corresponded with Leland on the desirability that a Society be formed '...to collect what is left of this fast vanishing people'.<sup>120</sup> A circular was sent out announcing the formation of the Gypsy Lore Society, which had eleven members and the first issue of the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* was printed the same year. There was an inherent racial dimension to the work of the Gypsy Lore Society, which was heavily influenced by the increasing prestige of science, and strove to apply the methods of anthropologists and ethnologists to the study of Gypsies. Groome advocated taking the study of Gypsies into their encampments and scholars such as Dr A Elysseeff investigated Gypsies from an anthropological standpoint by comparing the cephalic indexes of Gypsies from across Europe and Asia.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> His influence in these circles is discussed in Willems, *In Search of the True Gypsy*, p. 36.

<sup>119</sup> The debt owed by later scholars to Borrow was pointed out by a long time secretary to the Gypsy Lore Society in her autobiography, see D. Yates, *My Gypsy Days: Recollections of a Romani Rawnie*, London, 1953. p. 11. The relationship between the work of the Gypsy Lore Society and the Romantic Movement is considered in D. Mayall, "Lorist, Reformist and Romanticist: The Nineteenth Century Response to Gypsy Travellers," in *Immigrants and Minorities*, Vol. 4, No. 3. 1985. pp. 53-67.

<sup>120</sup> Letter from C.G. Leland to David MacRitchie, 26 Feb, 1888 cited in Robinns Pennell, *Charles Godfrey Leland*. Vol. II. p. 198. The work of MacRitchie in the Gypsy Lore Society is considered in A. McCormick, "David MacRitchie" in *JGLS*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. 4. 1925, pp. 49-51.

<sup>121</sup> A. Elysseeff "The Gypsies of Asia Minor" in *JGLS*, 1888, Vol. I, No 5. pp. 249-250.

Like Borrow, members of the Society were attached to a sentimental image of the Gypsy, as a symbol of freedom in an increasingly conformist world. Borrow's portrayal of himself as a unique confidant of the Gypsies also penetrated the Society. There seemed to be an irresistible appeal in the idea of the secrecy of a race that was accessible only to an elite few. Initially, Leland had urged MacRitchie that only those who spoke the Romani language should be admitted into the Society.<sup>122</sup> However, MacRitchie recognised that this would lead to economic hardship and that, for financial reasons, membership of the society would have to be wider. Whether or not they spoke the Romani language, the early academics of the Gypsy Lore Society strove to illustrate that they too had been brought into the confidence of this mysterious race. A pattern can be discerned within the work of members who felt obliged to prove a natural ability to win the trust of Gypsies.<sup>123</sup> Theodore Watts-Dunton claimed that, '...as a boy...he made friends with...that superior variety of the Romanies which Borrow had known years before'.<sup>124</sup> In an article in the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* Lady Burton, wife of scholar and member of the Gypsy Lore Society Richard Burton, made similar claims on behalf of her husband, who was rumoured to have had some Gypsy ancestry:

Nor did we ever enter a Gypsy camp without their claiming him: 'what are you doing with a black coat on?' they would say; why don't you join us and be our king.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Pennell, *Charles Godfrey Leland*, Vol. II. p. 198.

<sup>123</sup> Groome did this, claiming his close ties with Gypsy families prevented him revealing all that he had learned through his personal intimacy with them. Leland can also be seen to have endeavoured to show his intimacy with Gypsies in his writing. He quotes one Gypsy who he claims referred to him as 'my Rye' see C.G Leland, *The English Gipsies and their Language*, London: Trubner, 1873. p. 72.

<sup>124</sup> Douglas, *Theodore Watt-Dunton*, p. 61.

<sup>125</sup> Lady Burton, "Lady Burton's Life of her Husband" in *JGLS*, Vol. I, Jan 1888. p. 252. See also R. Burton, *The Jew, The Gypsy and El Islam*, London: Hutchinson, 1898. Burton's work with the Gypsy Lore Society is considered in E. Yates, "Sir Richard Francis Burton" in *JGLS*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. XLIII. 1964.

The argument that an elite few individuals possessed the necessary qualities to penetrate the veil of secrecy with which the Gypsies surrounded themselves, gave the lorists an increased sense of personal self-importance and authority. The myth had an additional function in that it meant any inconsistencies or absurdities within the work of scholars became very difficult to expose.

Scholars of the Gypsy Lore Society faced the same problem which Leland and Groome had already encountered, in that, for their romantic accounts of the Gypsy to be acceptable, they had to address the issue of the antipathetic images of the Gypsy presented in the work of earlier commentators. There was a further problem, in that, as scholars conducted field work it became apparent that their own observations did not support the view of Gypsies as a group with a static culture and identical physical characteristics. A number of arguments were adopted by scholars in their endeavour to overcome these difficulties. For example, Dr A. Elysseeff argued that the Gypsies were outcasts of various Hindu tribes and that this descent accounted for their cultural diversity. As a defender of the Gypsies against charges of theft and disorder, which, formed part of the negative stereotype, Elysseeff argued that different tribes had different racial characteristics and that thefts were committed by:

...the descendants of the castes of the Kafirs, these thorough rogues and horse thieves, who have drawn down upon the whole Gypsy race the unfavourable reputation of thieves...<sup>126</sup>

This idea was compatible with Grellmann's belief in the Indian origin of the Gypsies but enabled the negative stereotype to be put down to one section of the Gypsy population. In other instances, scholars accepted that at some, usually unspecified,

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<sup>126</sup> Elysseeff "The Gypsies of Asia Minor" pp. 249-250. A. Elysseeff, "Kounavine's *Material for the*

point in history, the Gypsies of a certain area had been barbarous and savage in a way unknown among the respectable British Gypsies.<sup>127</sup>

More commonly, scholars of the Gypsy Lore Society adopted ideas of racial degeneration in order to explain the discrepancies between contradictory images of Gypsies. The word 'Romany' came to imply 'true' Gypsy with original racial characteristics while the terms 'half-breed', 'didikais' and 'posh-rat' were applied to those believed to have degenerated from the original stock. Only the true Romanies were considered worthy of study by many members of the society.<sup>128</sup> The lorists were also anxious to emphasise that many of the crimes attributed to Gypsies were committed by non-Gypsy travellers whom they termed 'mumpers' and 'tramps'.

As with Borrow, the lorists were concerned that the true Gypsy was rapidly dying out in Britain.<sup>129</sup> This claim never led to the existence of a true Gypsy being questioned. However, the idea did result in an approach to the subject which might have been more appropriate to the study of an ancient civilisation with no links to the present day. The scholars of the Gypsy Lore Society consistently failed to regard the subjects of their interest in terms of a living culture, changing with each successive generation in exactly the same way as the dominant British culture. Any change was

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*Study of the Gypsies*", in *JGLS*, 1<sup>st</sup> Series, Vol. 2. 1890. pp. 161-173.

<sup>127</sup> Leland also argued that the Gypsies descended from more than one Indian stock which he believed explained the differences in character found amongst them, see his *The Gypsies*, p. 24.

<sup>128</sup> J. Sampson, "The Tinkers and Their Talk", *JGLS*, Vol. 2, No 4, 1890. pp. 204-220. Sampson considers whether the Tinkers too might be worthy of study but accepts that they will be received coldly by many scholars as they lack the pedigree of the true Romanies.

<sup>129</sup> L. Stephen, cited in Milford, *Borrow: Selections with Essays*, p. 23.

viewed as unnatural. Had not both Grellmann and Borrow emphasised the static nature of the Gypsy's culture and way of life? It was assumed that the discrepancy, which investigators found between their ideal mythical Gypsy and those with whom society came into frequent conflict, could be explained in terms of racial degeneration caused by the mixing of the Gypsy with the settled population and the subsequent infiltration of 'Gorgio blood'.<sup>130</sup> Members of the Society, therefore, hurried themselves in recording the language, customs and folklore of the Gypsies who, in their opinion, would soon vanish from the British countryside altogether. This assumption aided the development of images of the romantic mythical Gypsy and enabled such stereotypes to exist alongside those of heathens in the work of Grellmann. Throughout the nineteenth century such ideas continued to provide the basis for Gypsy studies. Regardless of the underlying objectives of the authors, they could draw upon such detail in order to confirm their expectations and justify their opinions. The Gypsy Lore Society dwindled and faded away in 1892 although it was to be revived in the early twentieth century, when it would continue to be instrumental in maintaining Gypsy stereotypes.

Although romantic images of the Gypsy became increasingly prominent in literature towards the end of the nineteenth century and were of great importance to members of the Gypsy Lore Society, there were those who continued to express an abhorrence for the nomadic way of life and to call for its abolition. Of particular importance, in this respect, are the crusades of the philanthropist and social reformer

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<sup>130</sup> F. Groome, *In Gipsy Tents*, p. 250.

George Smith of Coalville (1831-1895).<sup>131</sup> Smith campaigned on a variety of social issues during his years as a British MP. Indeed, he had already been a prominent voice in parliament over the issue of children in brickyards and canal boat life before he turned his attention to the Gypsies in the 1880s and 1890s and campaigned for legislation, which would regulate temporary dwellings.

According to Edwin Hodder, Smith's sympathetic biographer, the philanthropist was not interested in the origins of the Gypsies, unlike many of his fellow writers during the nineteenth century.<sup>132</sup> In fact, however, following in a long tradition of commentators on the Gypsies Smith did indulge in speculation over their origins. Nevertheless, his main concern was to draw attention to what he considered to be the appalling condition of the Gypsies and call for action to be taken to raise them above their existing way of life. In 1880 Smith published his *Gypsy Life* which laid down his views on the most appropriate way to reform the Gypsies and called for legislation to regulate temporary dwellings.

In order to increase support for his call for legislation, the philanthropist drew on the stock of negative images about Gypsies. Smith considered the group to be a depraved, idle, irreligious and unsanitary people and accepted popular ideas that they kidnapped children.<sup>133</sup> In words similar to those of Grellmann, he described:

A motley crowd of half-naked savages, carrion-eaters,  
dressed in rags, tatters, and shreds, usually called men,

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<sup>131</sup> see E. Hodder *George Smith (Of Coalville). The Story of an Enthusiast*, London, 1896. see also Smith George (Of Coalville), *I've Been a Gipsying*, London: T Fisher Unwin, 1885. And G. Smith, *Gypsy Life: An Account of our Gipsies and their Children with suggestions for their Improvement*, London: Houghton and Co, 1880.

<sup>132</sup> Hodder, *George Smith*, p.140.

<sup>133</sup> G. Smith, *I've Been A-Gipsying*, p 216.

women and children – some running, walking, loitering, traipsing, shouting, gaping and staring, the women with children on their backs and in their arms, old men and women tottering along, ‘leaning upon their staffs’: hordes of children following in the rear; hulking men, with lurcher dogs at their heels, sauntering along in idleness, spotting out their prey; donkeys loaded with sacks, mules with tents and sticks, and their vans and waggons carrying ill-gotten gain and plunder.<sup>134</sup>

However, whereas a major concern of earlier writers such as Hoyland, Roberts, Crabb and Baird who had called for the reformation of the Gypsies, related to their ignorance of the Christian religion, Smith emphasised his opposition to the group on the grounds that their lifestyle stood in direct opposition to the capitalist values of the nineteenth century. Smith’s concern over the Gypsies reflected the increasing conviction that the Government had a responsibility to deal with groups such as Gypsies who had traditionally been left to missionaries.<sup>135</sup> Smith argued that:

John Bull dislikes keeping the idle bastard children of other nations. He readily protects all those who tread upon English soil, but in return for this kindness, he expects them, like bees, to be all workers...If the Gipsies and others of the same class in this country will begin to ‘buckle to’, and set themselves out for real hardwork instead of cadging from door to door, they will find, extending to them the hand of brotherhood and sympathy, and the days of persecution passed.<sup>136</sup>

Like Smith, many of those who complained about the Gypsies, rested their arguments on social issues; they were offended by the group’s itinerant lifestyle, their labour patterns and their failure to practise the Christian religion, rather than any perceptions of racial difference.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Smith quoted in Hodder *George Smith*, p.143.

<sup>135</sup> Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth Century Society*, p. 130-131.

<sup>136</sup> Smith, *Gipsy Life*, pp. 21.

<sup>137</sup> Common complaints against the Gypsies by police, local councils and landowners during the



However, although Smith found the whole concept of nomadism offensive, he could not avoid drawing distinctions between members of the travelling population and implying that some sectors were more inclined towards criminality than others. Smith distinguished between 'real Romanies' and 'posh-gipsies', a term often used by lorists to describe half-blooded Gypsies. He appears to have accepted that the true Romanies were more respectable and therefore more open to the efforts of missionaries and social reformers:

Among the crowd of gipsies farther away there were two or three real Romanies who had 'begun to serve God' and were distributing tracts among the gipsy children, at which the scissor-grinding *posh* gipsy turned up his nose.<sup>138</sup>

Smith also accepted the idea of the Gypsy Lore Society that the Gypsies were undergoing some form of degeneration. He claimed that the '...healthy appearance of the former-day gipsies is fast passing away, and now, as a rule, they are pale, thin and sickly-looking.'<sup>139</sup> This apparent acceptance of some form of hierarchy within the nomadic population highlights the authority of romantic images of the Gypsies by the end of the nineteenth century. Indeed, such was the prevalence of these images that it was difficult for those who adhered to less flattering perceptions of the Gypsies to reject them outright. Instead, there was an increasing tendency for those who called for the regulation or reformation of the Gypsies to accept that there were or had once been a small number of respectable romantic Gypsies with admirable characteristics, but that a process of degeneration was underway among them.

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nineteenth century are examined in Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth Century Society*, chapter 7.

<sup>138</sup> Smith, *I've Been A-Gipsying*, pp. 212.

<sup>139</sup> Smith, *I've Been A-Gipsying*, pp. 213.

Although Smith failed in his political campaigns, he succeeded in gaining broad publicity for his views. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s he gave public lectures, wrote books, petitioned Parliament and sent letters to newspapers.<sup>140</sup> The responses provoked by Smith's campaigns, particularly in the press, reveal the extent to which negative images of the Gypsies were accepted throughout society. They also provide some evidence of an increasing tendency to consider the habits of the Gypsies as being grounded in nature or biology. In one news article, for example, Smith's efforts were scorned on the grounds that it was impossible to effect change among the Gypsies whose habits were grounded in nature:

What are we to do with children in whom these strange habits and beliefs, or rather wants of belief, are as much part of their nature as is their physical organisation? Darwin has told us that after generations had passed, the puppy with a taint of the wolf's blood in it would never come to its master's feet, but always approach him in a semi-circle. Not Kühleborn nor Undine herself is less susceptible of alien culture than the pure-blooded gipsy.<sup>141</sup>

The linking of existing stereotypes of the Gypsies with Darwin's theories of evolution is speculative and unscientific. However, the article illustrates the way in which commentators on the Gypsies could bolster the plausibility of their work by drawing on scientific theories, a tendency, which was to increase during the early twentieth century.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> See Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth Century Society*, p. 136.

<sup>141</sup> An unnamed news article reporting on Smith's campaigns of the 1880s cited in Hodder, *George Smith*, p.146. Kühleborn and Undine are fictional water-sprite characters from a fairy tale called *Undine* by La Motte Fouque published in Germany in 1811 and first translated into English in 1818. The character of Undine marries a human and gains a soul but later returns to her watery element. See K Briggs, *An Encyclopaedia of Fairies*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1976.

<sup>142</sup> This approach to the Gypsies during the early twentieth century is particularly evident in the work of the Gypsy Lore Society discussed in chapter five of this thesis.

### **Gypsy Commentators in Broader Perspective**

The accounts which sedentary commentators wrote of the Gypsies during the eighteenth nineteenth centuries varied widely in both detail and approach. A great deal depended on the personality or personal objective of the individual writer, and commentators were also influenced by the ever-changing social and political climates in which they were living. However, a number of broad patterns can be discerned in the work of those who interested themselves in the Gypsies during this period.

The most striking theme, is the lack of appreciation for the Gypsies as individuals. Instead, there was a common tendency to deal with the people under investigation as a monolithic group. There was a shared assumption that it was possible to identify characteristics common to all Gypsies or all nomads. The traits which commentators presented as the defining characteristics of the Gypsies varied widely in different accounts. However, most scholars, either overtly or implicitly, presented their readers with a model of the physical, cultural, moral and behavioural character of the group. In other words, there was a tendency to consider the Gypsies in terms of stereotypes. The stereotypes themselves changed over time. Hence, with the increase in interest in the rural landscape which developed with the Romantic Movement, the image of the Gypsy in the work of some artists and scholars, developed into a symbol of romantic country living. Such changes reflected the hopes and fears of sedentary society rather than any objective sign of change among the Gypsies. However, whether scholars adhered to romantic or antipathetic images, these stereotypes were presented as being accurate portrayals of the Gypsy.

Further patterns can be discerned in the approaches taken by commentators on the Gypsies, which reflect broader trends in social and scientific thinking during the period in which they were writing. In considering these developments it is possible to locate commentaries on the Gypsies within three broad chronological phases.

The first begins with the work of Grellmann during the later eighteenth century and persists until the middle of the nineteenth century and includes the work of the religious reformers Hoyland, Roberts, Crabb and Baird.<sup>143</sup> The unifying element in the accounts of these individuals is their marked tendency to express their opposition towards the Gypsies in cultural terms. All these figures expressed concerns over the Gypsies way of life and the physical hardships or moral dangers they associated with it. Although these writers also indulged in speculation about the historical descent of the Gypsies and argued that they had migrated to Europe from a common homeland, they did not relate their ideas about the culture, morals and behaviour of the group to their biological inheritance. Even where such writers expressed distaste for the physical appearance of the Gypsies, their abhorrence was often expressed in cultural terms. It might be argued, for example, that the Gypsies possessed coarse features, forged by exposure to the elements, or a dark skin caused by the dirt from their campfires. On occasion the term 'race' was applied to the Gypsies in the work of these early commentators. John Baird and James Crabb, for example, both employed it. However, during this period, it was used widely as a

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<sup>143</sup> See above.

cultural or social classification without the biological connotations which became attached to it later. The belief which Crabb and Baird expressed in the possibility of alleviating the moral and cultural failings of the group through compulsory education and missionary work supports a cultural interpretation of their use of the term 'race'. It would, therefore, be historically inaccurate to discuss references to race in the work of commentators on the Gypsy during this period in the context of biology.<sup>144</sup>

The second began around the middle of the nineteenth century. By this time a growing interest in biological theories of race was developing, in the work of many scientists and social commentators.<sup>145</sup> Many prominent scientists were convinced that the world could be divided into distinct races and there was a determination to draw the people of the world into clearly defined and therefore controllable categories. It was believed that taking objective quantitative measurements of an individual's physical characteristics could enable the scientist to identify his or her racial type. This racial classification was also considered to be the key to culture, behaviour and morality and hence, scientists believed that social deductions could be made from the complex physical measurements.<sup>146</sup>

These broad trends in scientific interest are reflected in the work of a number of Gypsy commentators after the mid-nineteenth century. The first inklings of a more biological understanding of the Gypsies, in the work of the commentators who have

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<sup>144</sup> G. Watson, *The English Ideology. Studies in the Language of Victorian Politics*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973. Pp. 199-200.

<sup>145</sup> Biddiss, argues that 'The first major systematic and genuinely ideological accounts of racial distinctions as the fundamental key to socio-political explanation come from the years around 1850'. See his *The Age of the Masses. Ideas and Society in Europe since 1870*, p. 44.

<sup>146</sup> Biddiss, *The Age of the Masses*, p. 115.

been considered, is to be found in the work of George Borrow. His suggestions of the Gypsies as a biological race are vague. Yet, it is he who cites, among other factors, intermixing with non-Gypsies as a reason for the decline of the true Gypsies. Early mentions of half-breed Gypsies are also evident in Borrow. The work of James Simson, similarly provides evidence of a more biological understanding of the Gypsies. Simson is clear that a person cannot stop being a Gypsy simply by marrying into the sedentary population and adopting a sedentary way of life. A person who possesses Gypsy blood continues to possess certain affinities to the Gypsy tribe.

However, suggestions of the Gypsies as a biologically defined race among these early figures remain extremely hazy. Their work does not represent an attempt to offer a clear bio-scientific theory of the Gypsies and in the work of other commentators around the same period, there is no suggestion of biology; the Gypsies continue to be defined in wholly cultural terms. This 'culturalism' is particularly evident in the work of Henry Mayhew, who, lumped Gypsies together with other groups who shared their economic status and offered a series of negative stereotypes of the culture and behaviour which he claimed to be characteristic of all these groups.<sup>147</sup>

The third phase developed towards the end of the nineteenth century. By this time biological theories of race were much in vogue and the influence of such ideas on Gypsy commentators is more apparent. Indeed, during this period commentators

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<sup>147</sup> Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, p. 1.

such as Leland who held dear to romantic images of the group and those, like George Smith, who perceived the Gypsies in terms of antipathetic stereotypes, were able to draw upon the idea of the Gypsies as a biologically defined race in support of their arguments.<sup>148</sup> In particular, both interpretations could draw authority from the idea of the Gypsies as a less developed people than the sedentary population. Thus, many commentators during this period invoked, either explicitly or implicitly, the idea of a hierarchy of man.

The use of ideas of hierarchy in explanations of the Gypsies can be more easily understood when considered within the broader social and scientific framework of the late nineteenth century, when ideas of racial hierarchy were extremely influential. Such theories stemmed in large part, from the influence of Charles Darwin, and the projection of his ideas of natural selection and the survival of the fittest onto the struggle between men of different nations. In the work of many European scientists the assumption prevailed that those who differed most in customs and appearance from the scientists themselves were somehow savage or primitive, and occupied a lower place within the human hierarchy.<sup>149</sup> In reality, this 'Social Darwinism' bore little relation to Darwin's own theories. However, it has been commented that:

By the end of the nineteenth century supremacy was being expressed to a degree hitherto unknown, in terms of innate racial hierarchization.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> This tendency is more pronounced in the work of Leland than Smith although, like Leland, Smith attempt to draw distinctions between pure Gypsies and those of mixed blood. See above.

<sup>149</sup> M. Banton, *Racial Theories*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. p. 76.

<sup>150</sup> Biddiss, *The Age of the Masses*, p. 44.

In this atmosphere scientists and social commentators alike could increase the sense of authority of their work by drawing upon the language of struggle and hierarchy.

In the case of the Gypsies, those who adhered to the antipathetic stereotype, could express the view that they were a lower race than the sedentary Europeans, possessing such qualities as innate criminality inherited from previous generation.<sup>151</sup> However, the language of hierarchy was not simply a means of expressing contempt for a group considered to be inferior. The same concept was also employed by some European writers as a means of expressing regret for qualities believed to have been lost in the course of progress. Thus, in the work of romantics, the Gypsies were idealised and compared directly to the advancing industrialised societies as a means to draw attention to the failings of recent industrialising developments which swept through the country, making it “the workshop of the world”.

The idea that the races of man could be drawn into a hierarchical model was not reserved exclusively for emphasising the superiority of the European over those people living outside Europe. The same concept was also drawn into accounts of internal European society and politics.<sup>152</sup> It was considered that the nations within Europe could be ranked in terms of superiority and inferiority.<sup>153</sup> Ireland, for example, had a similar status in the eyes of many Englishmen to colonies in Africa and Asia,

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<sup>151</sup> Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909), a Professor of psychiatry and criminal anthropology at the University of Turin, claimed that it was possible for a whole race to possess criminal characteristics inherited from previous generations and wrote of the Gypsies as ‘...the living example of a whole race of criminals. See Harrowitz, *Antisemitism, Misogyny and the Logic of Criminal Difference*, See also I. Hancock, *The Pariah Syndrome*, Michigan: Karoma Publishers, 1987. p. 113.

<sup>152</sup> V. Kiernan, *The Lord of Human Kind. European Attitudes to Other Cultures in the Imperial Age*, London: Serif, (first published 1969) 1995 edn. p. 29.

<sup>153</sup> M. Biddiss, “Racial Ideas and the Politics of Prejudice 1850-1914” in *The Historical Journal*, Vol.



and English stereotypes of Irishmen painted an unflattering picture of an inferior people.<sup>154</sup> This mode of thinking carried implications for the treatment of a group, such as the Gypsies, who could be found in both those European countries which were regarded as superior and those considered inferior. And indeed, within the work of British commentators, there is evidence of a discrepancy between the treatment of indigenous Gypsies and those who had migrated to Britain from elsewhere in Europe. Francis Hindes Groome, it will be recalled, wrote of the superiority of the English Gypsies to those described in Grellmann's dissertation on the Continental Gypsies.<sup>155</sup> Similar attitudes prevailed elsewhere and during the early twentieth century, the country of origin of a group of immigrant Gypsies in Britain was to be extremely influential in determining the treatment meted out to them in Britain.<sup>156</sup>

By the late nineteenth century, a number of commentators on the Gypsies were also drawing upon ideas of the existence of a racial hierarchy within the British nomadic population. It was claimed that through racial intermixing with the sedentary population a process of the racial degeneration had been set in motion among the Gypsies. This line of thought is particularly evident in the work of the Gypsy Lore Society, but went beyond the work of these scholars and is also evident in the work of the philanthropist George Smith. Such ideas also echoed broader trends in social and scientific thinking. In fact, the idea that the intermixing between men of different races would lead to racial degeneration was a commonplace belief in Britain and elsewhere during the late nineteenth century. This theory had emerged in the context

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XV, No. 3, 1972. p. 572.

<sup>154</sup> Kiernan, *The Lord of Human Kind*, p. 29.

<sup>155</sup> Groome, *The Gypsies*, p. 229.

<sup>156</sup> See below, chapter three and chapter six.

of class relations and the fear within academic circles that the differential birth rate between the middle and working classes was likely to cause the degeneration of the British population.<sup>157</sup>

The reconciliation of the antipathetic and romantic stereotypes of the Gypsy was not intrinsically dependent upon ideas of race and, on occasion, degeneration was explained in terms of economic redundancy, or moral decline, without being related to the question of racial intermixing.<sup>158</sup> Elsewhere, commentators employed both romantic and antipathetic stereotypes of the Gypsies simultaneously without considering it necessary to explain the discrepancy at all, suggesting that the Gypsies, once an admirable race of wanderers, were now nothing but a menace to society.

### Summary

By the beginning of the twentieth century, then, a series of images of the Gypsy had developed, which reflected the ambivalent emotions of sedentary Europeans. The antipathetic and romantic stereotypes of the group included both contempt and affection, yet were able to exist side by side in the minds of the sedentary population, without being regarded as contradictory. The development of a set of stereotypes, which included both positive and negative charges, is not unique to the history of the Gypsies. Stereotypes of the Jews during the same period reveal a

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<sup>157</sup> The ground for this had already been prepared by T. Malthus in his "Essay on the Principle of Population" which created an atmosphere in which "social Darwinism" flourished. Darwin once referred to natural selection as the "doctrine of Malthus, applied to the whole animal and vegetable kingdom." (cited in R. Young, "Malthus and the Evolutionists: The Common Context of Biological and Social Theory" in *Past and Present*, 1969, No 43. pp. 109-145). Galton also published a series of articles in the 1860s warning of the effects differential birth rate would have on the nation's intelligence, see G. Jones, *Social Darwinism and English Thought: The Interaction between Biological and Social Theory*, Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1980.

<sup>158</sup> See below. ch 2.

similar complexity, with the Jew being considered to represent both the virtues and the vices of capitalism.<sup>159</sup> Like the stereotypes of the Gypsy, these representations of the Jew demonstrated a degree of flexibility which enabled them to exist as a coherent rather than contradictory body of thought.

In the case of both the Gypsies and the Jews, different aspects of the stereotypes could be drawn into commentaries at different times.<sup>160</sup> The commentator could emphasise that feature which most complemented the image of the group which they wished to project and interpret it in a way which was regarded as most relevant to their own agenda. An aspect of the Gypsy stereotype in the work of romantics could be turned on its head in an antipathetic account and interpreted as a negative characteristic. Romantics might marvel at the wandering propensities of the Gypsies; their unexpected appearance in a village followed by their equally abrupt departure, and relate this to their personal liberty and closeness to nature. However, elsewhere such behaviour could be explained in terms of an attempt to escape detection for a criminal offence or a sign of idleness and unwillingness to participate in sedentary patterns of wage labour. These opposing interpretations both reflect reality insofar as they relate to the wandering habits observed among the Gypsies, yet also distort reality, reflecting, instead, the changeable sentiments of sedentary society.

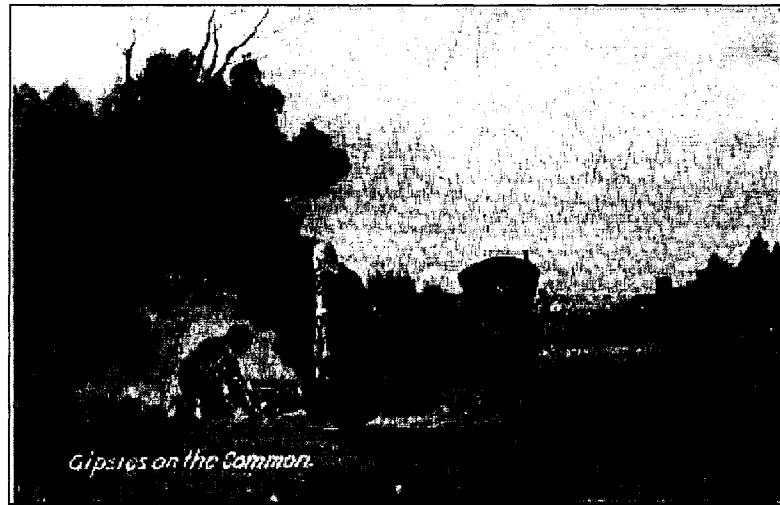
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<sup>159</sup> J. Higham, "Anti-Semitism in the Gilded Age: A Reinterpretation", in *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. XLIII, No. 4, March 1957, pp. 562-3.

<sup>160</sup> Higham, "Anti-Semitism in the Gilded Age: A Reinterpretation" pp. 564-566.

## Chapter Two

### Gypsy Representations



(1. “Gypsies on the common”: print of a painting postcard; depicting a man and woman lighting a fire and a wagon in the background.)

Before any relationship can be drawn between stereotypes of Gypsies and the responses to Gypsy groups encountered in early twentieth century Britain, it is necessary to examine the characteristics of the stereotypes more precisely, and to consider their place in British culture. Many of the prominent nineteenth century works of literature, which included Gypsy characters, remained popular during the early twentieth century and images of nomads continued to be employed by writers, artists and reporters.<sup>1</sup> The ideas of the nineteenth century Gypsy lorists also lingered on and continued to be drawn upon by commentators who sought endorsement of their own assertions.<sup>2</sup> In short: both romantic and antipathetic images of wanderers

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<sup>1</sup> The work of George Borrow continued to make new editions throughout the early twentieth century, see G. Black, *A Gypsy Bibliography*, Edinburgh: University Press, 1914.

<sup>2</sup> “The Walking Lord of Gypsy Lore” in *Public Opinion*, 13 June 1913.

found a place in early twentieth century Britain and both ultimately had an impact on shaping responses to the nomads from all sectors of society.

In order to explore the nature of images of the Gypsies in early twentieth century Britain, this investigation must examine representations of their appearance, culture, and way of life. The aim here is not to assess the accuracy of these images. While some portrayals of the nomads may well have been accurate, others were not only unreliable but were also manipulated and exaggerated to suit the agenda of the commentator. However, such representations are vital to an examination of responses to such groups in early twentieth century society, as they were frequently more important in determining the treatment of the nomads than the behaviour of the people themselves.

There were three dominant ways of accounting for the identity of the British Gypsies during the early twentieth century. The first was to consider them as part of a broad class of itinerants consistent with the way in which the journalist Henry Mayhew had portrayed them.<sup>3</sup> This interpretation was particularly prominent in accounts of the Scottish Tinkers. In such accounts Gypsies were represented along with itinerant hawkers and tramps as a group sharing similar social and economic circumstances and were not presented as racially distinct from the sedentary British people.<sup>4</sup> The second interpretation of the group's identity, was of a romantic race of

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<sup>3</sup> H. Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, ed J. D. Rosenberg, New York: Dover, 1968. Vol. p. 2. See also K. Malik, *The Meaning of Race*, London: Macmillan, 1996. pp. 94-95.

<sup>4</sup> S. Mais, *It Isn't Far From London*, London: Richards, 1930. p. 312.

wanderers, distinct from both the sedentary population and other nomads. This perception involved the idea that the Gypsies had originated from a common homeland and had never mixed with the sedentary people among whom they moved.<sup>5</sup> The third understanding of the identity of the group was of a degenerate people who no longer possessed their original racial qualities but through persisting with their wandering had come to pose a problem to the sedentary population. Where this observation was applied to the Gypsies it was often represented as a process of racial degeneration. These three identities were not inherently contradictory. Hence often the Gypsies would be portrayed as a distinct race, which could be identified within the wider itinerant population, with different physical characteristics and behavioural patterns from those with whom they shared their economic class.

### **A Broad Class of Itinerants**

Antipathy towards itinerants was not expressed solely in terms of opposition towards their life-style and employment patterns. In fact, almost any aspect of the nomadic way of life had the potential to be incorporated into antipathetic commentaries.<sup>6</sup> In reference to the Gypsies, the 1910 edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* asserted that:

They have no ethical principles and they do not recognise the obligations of the ten commandments. There is extreme moral laxity in the relation of the two sexes, and on the whole they

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<sup>5</sup> "Queer Communities of Great Britain" in *Poole Herald*, 30 July 1908. However, the idea that the Tinkers had been or perhaps still were racially distinct from the wider Scottish population was also apparent. Some commentators attempted to prove this racial distinction and speculated as to the relationship of the Scottish Tinkers to the English and Welsh Gypsies.<sup>5</sup> However, ideas about racial distinction tended to be less prevalent in commentaries on the Tinkers.

<sup>6</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1911. Also cited in I. Hancock, *The Pariah Syndrome*, Michigan: Karoma Publishers, 1987, p. 114. See also D. Crowe, and J. Kolsti, *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe*, New York: M.E Sharpe, 1991, p. 4.

take life easy, and are complete fatalists. At the same time they are great cowards.<sup>7</sup>

There were, however, a number of themes which were consistently drawn into negative representations of the nomads.

Commentators who employed negative images of the Gypsies emphasised the gulf which they considered to exist between this group and the sedentary population. Inherent in negative images of the Gypsies as a distinct people was the idea that they were inferior to sedentary British citizens. It was often implied, and sometimes openly claimed, that the Gypsies possessed different mental traits from the wider population in Britain marking them out as an inferior people.<sup>8</sup> In 1912 Thomas Holmes wrote of all the nomadic people of Britain as ‘reverts’ or ‘throwbacks’ from a more primitive stage in the development of man.<sup>9</sup> As reverts the author believed that the existence of the nomads was detrimental to the continued advancement of what he called the British race and that action should be taken to secure the ‘...permanent detention and segregation for these low types of unfortunate humanity’.<sup>10</sup> The inferiority of the Gypsies to the sedentary British public was even more pronounced in an article entitled “Should the Gipsy be Abolished” which appeared in *Public Opinion* in 1910. In examining the relationship between the Gypsies and the sedentary public, the reporter echoed the words of Henry Mayhew:

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<sup>7</sup> “Gipsy” in *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 11<sup>th</sup> edition, Vol XII, 1910. pp. 40-42.

<sup>8</sup> See for example “Gipsy and Jew: A Parallel” in *The Golden Penny*, Oct 1908.

<sup>9</sup> T. Holmes, *London's Underworld*, London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1912. p. 61.

<sup>10</sup> Holmes, *London's Underworld*, p. 63.

Other races never grow accustomed to him because he never grows accustomed to them. He is so distinct from them that you might divide humanity into two main species, men and gipsies; the division being so deep that no force of circumstance is strong enough to bring these two species into any real social relation with each other.<sup>11</sup>

At times the Gypsies were presented not only as a lower group but a potentially dangerous people who conflicted with the well being of the sedentary population. The accusation that the Gypsies remained loyal to their own people and customs to the detriment of the values of sedentary British society was common place. It was suggested that: 'Allegiance is owed primarily to the family, after that to the Gypsy race and, as a poor third, to the country in which they happen to live for the moment'.<sup>12</sup>

Often images of the dark appearance of the Gypsies were employed as a suggestion of their strangeness, dirtiness or the danger they posed to the respectable public. Hence, when a group of foreign nomads arrived in Britain in 1920, one newspaper reported that '...a tribe of small dark men...' was giving much uneasiness to the public.<sup>13</sup> Animal imagery was often drawn into such negative representations as a means to emphasise the gulf believed to exist between the Gypsies and the sedentary population, particularly in the popular press which gave powerful and authoritative accounts of the animal tendencies of the nomads, often insinuating that the Gypsies were more akin to beasts than to mankind. In one instance, when

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<sup>11</sup> "Should the Gipsy be Abolished" in *Public Opinion*, 17 June 1910.

<sup>12</sup> G. Ross, "It's the Gypsy in Them" in *Today*, May 1946.

<sup>13</sup> "New Tribe of Gipsies. England Invaded by Nomads from France" in *Empire News*, 12 Dec 1920.



reporting that the police had compelled a group of nomads to spend a night in a cattle market, a Leicester newspaper claimed that they quickly and contentedly found themselves at home in the pig pens.<sup>14</sup> Elsewhere animality was implied by the adjectives used in describing the Gypsies. In 1920 a Scottish newspaper described a group of nomads as a ‘...whole swarm of hurdy-gurdies’.<sup>15</sup> As an animal-like people, perceived to be both outside and inferior to the British racial group, images of Gypsies in written accounts attributed them with the qualities which most offended popular ideas on decency and respectability.

One of the most prominent negative images of the nomads was that they were a criminal and idle people.<sup>16</sup> Hard work was a powerful symbol of respectability in early twentieth century Britain and such images served to reinforce the social position of the nomads as being far below that of the poorest manual labourers. The nomadic way of life was presented as a means to escape the responsibilities of living in a house. By travelling around the country, it was claimed that the nomads could avoid work, ‘...loaf about and get what they can by thieving’.<sup>17</sup> The press often claimed that theft was so prevalent among the nomads that ‘no property is safe from gipsies anywhere near the commons that they haunt’.<sup>18</sup> In fact, so deep had the image of the Gypsies as a criminal and idle people penetrated society by the early twentieth

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<sup>14</sup> “German Gipsies in Leicester” in *Leicester Daily Post*, 2 Nov 1906.

<sup>15</sup> “A Gipsy Invasion” in *Dundee Courier*, 16 Dec 1920.

<sup>16</sup> “Rural Beauty. How to Deal with Gipsies” in *The Times*, 4 April 1921.

<sup>17</sup> First quotation taken from *Select Committee [HL] on the Moveable Dwellings Bill., Minutes of Evidence* of Reginald Farrar, Medical Inspector Of the Local Government Board, para. 360. Second quotation taken from Chief Constable of Warwickshire in letter to the Secretary of State, 15 Nov, 1906. PRO Ref: Ho 45/10313/124855/84.

<sup>18</sup> “Invasion of Gipsies” in *West Sussex Gazette*, 19 May, 1906.

century, that even those who adhered to romantic images of wanderers accepted these charges as part of the Gypsy's nature. In 1910, the naturalist W.H Hudson, wrote that:

He is a parasite, but free and as well able to exist free as the fox or jackal; but the parasitism pays him well, and he has followed it so long in his intercourse with social man that it has come to be like an instinct, or secret knowledge.<sup>19</sup>

The artist Sir Alfred Munnings held a similar perception of the Gypsies and proclaimed that their '...one idea in life was to move about the country and get all the money they could out of other people'.<sup>20</sup> Often claims that the Gypsies committed crime would be supported by the assertion that, as an undeveloped race, they held primitive views as to the rights of property. That same view appeared later in 1937, when one writer on the countryside argued that among the 'truly primitive minded' there seemed to be '...a conviction that free access to fuelling is the indisputable right of man'.<sup>21</sup>

Evidence of the trades and occupations carried out by the Gypsies tended to be ignored by those who adhered to the negative stereotype. In giving testimony to the Committee on Moveable Dwellings in 1909, Sir Reginald Justice Bray complained that '...Gypsies did not seem to work, and had no compunction in cutting down trees for the purpose of making walking sticks'.<sup>22</sup> However, the possibility that the manufacturing of walking sticks, in sufficient numbers to mark the landscape, could constitute work does not seem to have been apparent. Elsewhere when the

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<sup>19</sup> Hudson, *A Shepard's Life*, p. 305.

<sup>20</sup> Sir A. Munnings, *The Second Burst*, London: Museum Press, 1951. p. 279.

<sup>21</sup> C. Leighton, *Country Matters*, London: Victor Gollancz, 1937. p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> "Mr. Justice Bray on Gypsies" in *Daily Telegraph*, 9 Oct 1909.

economic activities of the nomads were mentioned, it would be suggested that they were not engaged in legitimate occupations. An article on Gypsies in *The Golden Penny* magazine in 1908, for example, referred to the practices of horse-breeding and horse-dealing as being ‘...the natural resource of the idle’.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, it was commonly claimed that the hawking of manufactured goods was ‘...merely an excuse for begging’.<sup>24</sup> So widespread was the perception of the nomads as an idle people that often, the smallest fragment of evidence was taken to be confirmation that this was the case. In 1917, an Inspector of Poor in Scotland found that the diet of the Tinkers settled in houses during the winter consisted of tea, bread and a pot of jam. Such fare, he reported, showed that ‘...the mothers are poor cooks...they used tinned meats, anything that will save labour’.<sup>25</sup> In fact, the foods said to constitute the Tinker’s diet bore a striking resemblance to those George Orwell found to be the staple foods of the working classes during his study of the 1930s.<sup>26</sup> However, so deeply-held was the perception of the nomads as an inferior group to the sedentary poor, that the similarities between the two groups were rarely the object of discussion.

Another accusation frequently hurled at the Gypsies was that they were insanitary. Although this charge had been made against nomads for centuries, during the early twentieth century, it came to take on new meaning. There was a tendency for government health campaigns to focus on the overwhelming importance of cleanliness to good health, while the social and economic factors, such as poor diet

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<sup>23</sup> “Gipsy and Jew: A Parallel” in *The Golden Penny*, Oct 1908.

<sup>24</sup> *Report of the Committee on Vagrancy in Scotland*, (1936). para. 91.

<sup>25</sup> Witness statement of Mr J. Buchanan Lang, Inspector of Poor, Maybole, cited in *Report of the Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland*, (1918). para. 79.

<sup>26</sup> G. Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, London: Victor Gollancz, 1937. pp. 96-97.

and ventilation, which were understood to contribute to poor health, were ignored.<sup>27</sup> In fact 'racial hygiene' became a slogan in the campaign to encourage the British people to lead a healthy life by keeping themselves clean.<sup>28</sup> Although many of the poorest classes lived in squalid conditions during the early twentieth century, the association drawn between cleanliness and being British, made the image of dirtiness a potent symbol. Consequently, the allegation that the nomads were unclean, implied that they were outsiders who were therefore an inferior group, repugnant to the sedentary British public.<sup>29</sup> Such a charge served to reinforce, in the minds of those who repeated it, their own position as respectable British citizens.<sup>30</sup> In 1911 *The Spectator* reported that:

The surroundings of a gipsy camp are in the highest degree disgusting...horse manure and human filth of every description litter the ground...It is astonishing that modern civilisation should have been defied for so long by these strange people.<sup>31</sup>

W.H Hudson gave weight to such accusations by implying that the tendency for the Gypsies to leave litter was somehow grounded in nature or biology. When describing a village in the south of England in which he believed a significant proportion of the population was of Gypsy descent, Hudson qualified his observation by asserting that the village was 'as dirty and disorderly - a place as can be imagined'. He added that

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<sup>27</sup> H. Jones, *Health and Society in Twentieth Century Britain*, London: Longman, 1994. p. 77.

<sup>28</sup> M. Banton, *Racial Theories*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. p. 75.

<sup>29</sup> B. Gainer, *The Alien Invasion. The Origins of the Aliens Act of 1905*, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1972. p. 46.

<sup>30</sup> D. Read, *Edwardian England 1901-1915. Society and Politics*, London: Harap, 1972. pp. 24-25.

<sup>31</sup> "Gipsies and the Plague" in *The Spectator*, 4 March 1911.

‘...the ground round every cottage resembling a gipsy camp, but worse owing to its greater litter of old rags and rubbish strewn about’.<sup>32</sup>

Despite the relationship drawn between the nomadic way of life and good health in the work of romantics, in negative representations not only was it claimed that the Gypsies were dirty in themselves but often that they posed a threat of disease to the respectable British public.<sup>33</sup> The idea that travelling people could be carriers of infectious diseases and responsible for carrying those diseases from place to place had a long history.<sup>34</sup> This accusation not only marked the nomads out as different and inferior to the sedentary public, but as a danger to them. On a number of occasions during the early twentieth century it was claimed that where such groups camped near a stream they were likely to endanger the purity of the water supply to local residents:

...where, as in many places, there is a large body of nomads encamped together with the haziest notions of modern sanitary precautions, pollution of water and other nuisances are likely to ensue with consequent injury to public health.<sup>35</sup>

Whenever a Gypsy population in an area was reported to have been on the increase, the local press would speculate that the Gypsies could be ‘...the cause of introducing many infectious diseases’.<sup>36</sup> The national newspapers indulged in similar speculation and in March 1911 *The Spectator* ran a story on the threat of a re-emergence of the

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<sup>32</sup> Hudson, *A Shepard's Life*, p. 265.

<sup>33</sup> See W. H. Dawson, *The Vagrancy Problem. The Case for Measures of Restraint for Tramps, Loafers and Unemployables*, London: P.S. King, 1910. pp. 40-41.

<sup>34</sup> See P. Slack, “Vagrants and Vagrancy in England 1598-1664” in P. Clark and D. Souden (eds), *Migration and Society in Early Modern England*, London, 1987. p. 49. See also D. Mayall “Egyptians and Vagabonds: Representations of the Gypsy in Early Modern Official and Rogue Literature” in *Immigrants and Minorities*, Vol. 16, No 3, Nov 1997. p. 61.

<sup>35</sup> “Danger to Public Health” in *Morning Post*, 11 Aug 1910.

<sup>36</sup> “Invasion of Gipsies” in *West Sussex Gazette*, 19 May 1906.

plague which, it was claimed, could be spread across the country by Gypsies who lived in close proximity to rats.<sup>37</sup> Similar views were held across Europe and on occasion an outbreak of disease abroad which was said to have been caused by Gypsies would spark off speculation about the possibility of dangerous diseases being harboured by British nomads.<sup>38</sup> Even those who spent time among the nomads often contributed to ideas circulating about their sanitary state. In his autobiography Sir Alfred Munnings wrote of how he ‘...saw the gyppos again; had tea with them and carried a flea or two away...’<sup>39</sup>

Where there were calls to remove nomads from a particular area in which they were considered to be a nuisance, it was often suggested that they posed an immediate danger to the health and property of the local residents. A common accusation was that the cooking fires on encampments could get out of control. In 1936 one local newspaper reporting on the arrival of a group of Gypsies in the area claimed that many complaints had been made by local residents about ‘...the disgusting smoke’ from cooking fires on the camp. It was suggested that such fires were ‘injurious to their homes and health’.<sup>40</sup> In fact, no connection between the presence of Gypsies in an area and the outbreak of fires had ever been proven. However, the absence of a link did not prevent this speculation in the press. Such negative stereotypes of the Gypsies often led reporters to herald evictions of the Gypsies as triumphs for the police and local populations.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> “Gipsies and the Plague” in *The Spectator*, 4 March 1911.

<sup>38</sup> “Gipsies and the Plague” in *The Spectator*, 4 March 1911.

<sup>39</sup> Munnings, Sir Alfred, *The Second Burst*, pp. 81.

<sup>40</sup> “Hatfield Gypsy Encampment” in *Herts Advertiser*, 10 July 1936.

<sup>41</sup> Such an account can be seen in *The Penny Illustrated Paper*, 15 August 1905 when over one hundred

While romantics delighted in evidence that the Gypsies had remained dear to their own traditions and customs, in negative representations the fact that many nomads did not or were seen not to conform to the behaviour expected of members of the sedentary population, could be a source of condemnation. Hence accusations of immorality were levelled at the Gypsies for their failure to observe religious practices. A common complaint in Scotland was that ‘...they are a law unto themselves, and use the sabbath as an ordinary working day’.<sup>42</sup> The failure of the nomads to adhere to gender roles accepted by members of sedentary society was a further cause of reproach. In one instance, the fact that a group of Gypsy men had travelled in carts while the women of the party proceeded on foot provoked hostility from the press. Reports expressed great disapproval for the way in which the men had monopolised seats of the vehicles while ‘...the women (many of them with infants in arms) trudged alongside’.<sup>43</sup>

The nomadic life also attracted accusations of sexual immorality. In giving evidence to the Committee on Moveable Dwellings, Dr Henry Morris Chester expressed grave concerns that few marriages appeared to be taking place among the Gypsies. Indeed, he claimed that the adherence to their own rites and ceremonies rather than the official marriage service resulted in many illegitimate children being born.<sup>44</sup> Disapproval was also expressed at the idea that whole families should have no

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policemen were involved in the eviction of a group of Gypsies from Staffordshire. See Crofton, H., “Affairs of Egypt 1892-1906” *JGLS*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Series, Vol. 1. 1908. pp. 358-384.

<sup>42</sup> “The Alien Gipsies A Nuisance” in *Dundee Advertiser*, 14 Jan 1912.

<sup>43</sup> “On Treck” in *Leicester Daily Post*, 10 Nov 1906.

<sup>44</sup> *Select Committee [HL] on the Moveable Dwellings Bill., Minutes of Evidence of Dr Henry Morris Chester, Parish of Seale, Surrey, County Councillor, (1909), para. 840.*

other home than a few yards of canvas or a small cart.<sup>45</sup> It offended accepted ideas on British respectability that many people should be sleeping within such a small area. In his evidence to the Committee on Moveable Dwellings Reginald Justice Bray suggested that:

One would suppose that it could not be a moral life. Men and women, boys and girls must sleep together and there is every opportunity for immorality.<sup>46</sup>

In reality, many working class families lived in cramped conditions during the early twentieth century and examples of whole families being forced to share one bed can be found into the 1930s.<sup>47</sup> However, the fact that in many instances the living conditions of the Gypsies were similar to those of many manual workers did not lessen the hostility which such accusations provoked. Indeed, not only were the nomads rumoured to be immoral but it was also often suggested that they could have a degrading influence on the sedentary poor.<sup>48</sup>

More damning still was the accusation was that the Gypsies posed a threat to women and children of the sedentary population.<sup>49</sup> Sometimes the threat was said to be one of deception owing to the vulnerability or credulousness of women and the idea that the nomads were expert swindlers. It was claimed that ‘...they see that there

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<sup>45</sup> T. W. Wilkinson, in “Van Dwelling London” in G.R Sims (ed) *Living London*, Vol. III, London: Cassell and Co, 1905. p. 321.

<sup>46</sup> Reginald Justice Bray in evidence to the House of Lords Select Committee on Moveable Dwellings. PRO Ref: HO 45/10995/158231/13.

<sup>47</sup> M. Spring-Rice, *Working Class Wives; their health and conditions*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1939. pp. 143 and 152.

<sup>48</sup> In 1910 a petition for the protection of Hurtwood Common in Surrey called for the removal of the Gypsies because of they set a bad example and had a degrading influence on the villagers. PRO: HO 45/10995/158231/16.

<sup>49</sup> Jones, *Health and Society in Twentieth Century Britain*, p. 79.



is no one but women servants on the premises, and then walk boldly into yards and annex what they want'.<sup>50</sup> Elsewhere the precise nature of the threat which the groups were said to pose to women was less specific. Newspaper reports often suggested that it was '...not safe for a woman to walk about in lonely places owing to the presence of the gipsies'.<sup>51</sup>

The belief that nomads posed a risk to the children of the sedentary public also lingered on throughout the early twentieth century. It was widely believed that the Gypsies brutally neglected their own children. Indeed, in 1912 one writer claimed that Gypsy children were: 'Half-naked, uncared for, dirty beyond belief, untended in illness, untaught in health'.<sup>52</sup> Even respected and authoritative mediums accused the nomads of child neglect. The 1910 edition of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* suggested that 'it sometimes happens that a Gipsy mother will hold her child by the legs and beat the father with it'.<sup>53</sup> Likewise in children's fiction Gypsies were often presented as being cruel to their children.<sup>54</sup> At times those who sought the removal of the nomads drew on such images and suggested that they might also be likely to abuse the children of the sedentary public. In evidence to the Committee on Moveable Dwellings, Dr Henry Morris Chester, a County Councillor of Surrey argued that

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<sup>50</sup> "The Tyranny of the Nomad" in *Tewkesbury Record*, 4 May 1907.

<sup>51</sup> "Judge and Gipsies: Surrey Overrun with Nomads" in *The Grimsby Telegraph*, 9 October 1909.

<sup>52</sup> "The Gipsy Scandal and the Danger to the Commons" in *National Review*, 1912, pp. 459-472. [SMGC E-1-99].

<sup>53</sup> "Gipsy" in *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 11<sup>th</sup> edition, Vol. XII, 1910. pp. 40-42.

<sup>54</sup> See for example H. Davidson, *A Gypsy Brownie*, London: The Whitefriars Press, 1933. This children's story tells of a young Gypsy girl who, having been abused and then abandoned by her tribe is taken in by a local family and gratefully takes to a settled life.

parents lived in fear of their children being 'ill-used' by Gypsies.<sup>55</sup> The idea that Gypsies stole children, presented in the work of many eighteenth and nineteenth century commentators, lingered on. In an article on the Welsh Gypsies published in 1900 Rev Richard Roberts wrote that in Wales:

Many a heartbreaking tale was told of children taken from their homes and carried by the Gypsy into his secret encampment.' Therefore, he wrote: 'Should a child be noisy and troublesome, the hint "The Gipsy is coming" was sufficient to restore perfect tranquillity.'<sup>56</sup>

At times even Government reports contributed to rumours of Gypsy child-snatchers. In 1918 the Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland reported that in the past the Tinkers had been known to steal the children of others. It was claimed that this inclination stemmed from their idleness which led them to kidnap children who could be brought up to serve them.<sup>57</sup> The idea of children either being taken by, or running away with Gypsies, continued to be a device used in children's fiction and it would seem that children continued to be taught to fear the Gypsies.<sup>58</sup> In his autobiography published in 1932, the poet Frank Kendon recalled how he had been terrified by an encounter with Gypsies as a child:

There was no link of humanity between us - these gipsies were, to me, wild and dangerous creatures of the earth, thieves and kidnappers, outlaws - and I slid down through the thick wet grass of the bank and hurried away, frightened to run however, lest

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<sup>55</sup>*Select Committee [HL] on the Moveable Dwellings Bill., Minutes of Evidence*, of Dr Henry Morris Chester, Parish of Seale, Surrey, County Councillor, (1909), para. 1010.

<sup>56</sup> R. Roberts, "Y Simsiwn Cymreig" in *Cymru*, Vol. VIX. No. III. Oct, 1900. pp. 153-154.

<sup>57</sup>*Report of the Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland*, (1918), para. 34.

<sup>58</sup> See for example I. Brown, *Romany Road. The Story of Pete Brockaus. Thought to have been Kidnapped by Gypsies*, New York: Quinn and Boden Company, 1932.

running should be provocation.<sup>59</sup>

Sir Alfred Munnings had similarly learned to fear Gypsies as a child. He recalled how running on ahead from his party during a family walk he came across a Gypsy encampment and ‘...dashed back in terror to those behind’.<sup>60</sup> Periodically the idea that the nomads stole children was given weight by press reports on children alleged to have been kidnapped by Gypsies.<sup>61</sup> There was, for example, a great deal of public interest in the case of a girl from Bradford who disappeared in 1928. The girl’s parents were convinced that she had been kidnapped by a group of Gypsies camped nearby. Two years later the girl was reported to have been found in the company of a Gypsy. The Gypsy was tried for kidnapping although eventually the case was dismissed after the girl, who was by this time over eighteen, protested that she had asked the Gypsy to take her with him.<sup>62</sup> Even though it was found that the Gypsy had not abducted the girl, the story made for sensational headlines.

British Gypsies were often presented thus as a distinct and inferior people. However, there was an even greater distaste for foreign nomads. In one instance, when groups of German Gypsies entered the country in the first decade of the century, they were described by the press as ‘...undesirable aliens in the broadest sense of the word’ and ‘...the most unwelcome aliens who have ever landed on this

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<sup>59</sup> F. Kendon, *The Small Years*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932. p. 192.

<sup>60</sup> Sir A. Munnings, *An Artist’s Life*, London: Museum Press, 1950. p. 25.

<sup>61</sup> In 1944 the case of a six-year-old miner’s daughter who disappeared from Bolton was widely reported by the press. Local people rumoured that the girl had been kidnapped by Gypsies. See “New clue in wartime riddle of missing girl” in *The Times*, 6 June 2001.

<sup>62</sup> “Gipsy Acquitted. Dramatic Collapse of Abduction Charge” in *News of the World*, 31 July 1930.

side of the channel'.<sup>63</sup> When it came to reporting on foreign Gypsies in Britain, the press portrayed a savage and licentious people, who posed a significant threat to the respectable British public.<sup>64</sup> The difference between the way in which indigenous and foreign nomads were treated by the British press was such that there was even a tendency for reporters to draw contrasts between them as a means to illustrate the barbarous condition of the foreigners. When a group of foreign Gypsies were reported to be heading for British shores in 1920 the *Dundee Courier* warned that '...they are not English gipsies...They are smaller, darker, more squalid, altogether much nearer to a state of savagery'.<sup>65</sup> The increased degree of hostility expressed towards foreign nomads is symptomatic of the suspicion and dislike of all foreigners in Britain. In this atmosphere of fear and distrust towards those who arrived in Britain from abroad, immigrant Gypsies were more conspicuous as an alien people than those who had resided in Britain for centuries. In fact, when the sedentary population feared that they were to be swamped by an invasion of foreign Gypsies, the press would be quick to champion the rights of the British nomads. There is at least one example of a newspaper expressing hostility towards foreign Gypsies on the grounds that their presence could be detrimental to the livelihoods of more respectable British vagrants. Such an accusation was far from rational. Indeed, as a group who existed at the very margins of the economy in Britain, it was rare for the Gypsies to be perceived as an economic threat to other members of society. However, the newspaper claimed that the presence of foreign Gypsies could reduce the work available for the heroic

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<sup>63</sup> First quotation taken from "The Gipsies' Fate" in *Eastern Morning News*, 15 Nov 1907. Second quotation taken from "The German Gipsies in Leicester" in *Leicester Daily Post*, 10 Nov 1906.

<sup>64</sup> "Servian Gipsies refused a Landing at Hull" in *Yorkshire Post*, 15 Nov 1907.

<sup>65</sup> "A Gipsy Invasion" in *The Dundee Courier*, 16 Dec 1920.

vagrant ex-servicemen who had taken to playing the barrel organ after the First World War.<sup>66</sup>

Images and stereotypes of the Gypsies as a dirty, idle, immoral and disorderly people continued to be employed throughout the early twentieth century in very much the same way as they had been during the nineteenth century. The persistence of such images had little to do with the state of the nomads themselves. Such people, living an outdoor life, may well have appeared dirty at times, yet there is no reason to expect that they were any less clean than many manual labourers, who were often equally poor. The nomads were widely portrayed as a group who cared nothing for the values of sedentary society and had no aspirations to improve their condition. Thus negative images gave those at the bottom of society something against which to measure their worth as they aspired to better things.

### **A Romantic Race of Wanderers**

Throughout the early twentieth century the romantic image of the Gypsy continued to capture the imagination the British people and such images can be found in art, literature and the press. During this period romantic images of the Scottish Tinkers also became increasingly common and these too were incorporated into novels, plays, poems, and on occasion press reports.<sup>67</sup> In the introduction to a book of romantic poetry about the lives of the Scottish Tinkers, one writer argued that:

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<sup>66</sup> "A Gipsy Invasion" in *The Dundee Courier*, 16 Dec 1920.

<sup>67</sup> See for example M. Dawson, *Tinker's Twa in Peace and War*, Paisley: Alexander Gardner, 1921. N. Tranter, *Tinker's Pride*, London: Ward, Locke and Co, 1945. D. Paton, *The Tinker's Warning. A One Act Scots Play*, Glasgow: Brown, Son and Ferguson, 1952. H. Malleson, *Napoleon Boswell, tales of the*

Tinker lad and Tinker lass are much the same clay, and have been subjected to much the same moulding, as Romany man and Romany maid and warmed by the same sun, and disciplined mind and body, in the same strenuous and sanative school of Dame Nature, the gates of which are closed to the unfortunate dwellers of city slums.<sup>68</sup>

The tendency of those who wrote romantic accounts of the Scottish Tinkers to emphasise their similarities with the English and Welsh Gypsies appears to have arisen from of a wish to give credibility to their work. Romantic images of Gypsies were well-established by the beginning of the twentieth century and so provided an important point of reference to those who held romantic beliefs about other wanderers. Those writers interested in canal boatmen during the same period were likewise inclined to speculate about their possible relationship to the Gypsies. In 1918, for example, C. J. Aubertin wrote of the canal boat people, 'I am convinced...that half of them...are of gypsy blood'.<sup>69</sup> The relationship he drew between the two groups was further emphasised by the title of his volume, *A Caravan Afloat*. Similarly E. Temple Thurston argued that the boatmen were of Spanish Gypsy origin.<sup>70</sup>

The idea that the Gypsies were a more primitive and simple race than the sedentary British people was often incorporated into romantic images. As a people widely believed to have originated from India hundreds of years earlier, yet who had

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tents, London: Smith Elder and Co, 1913.

<sup>68</sup> Dawson, *Tinker's Twa in Peace and War*, p. 9.

<sup>69</sup> C. Aubertin, *A Caravan Afloat*, London: Simkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent and Co, 1918. p. 95. See also H. Hanson, *The Canal Boatmen 1760-1914*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975. p. 1. Hanson refutes the claims of early twentieth century writers on the canal boatmen arguing that there is little historical evidence to suggest that the group shares its origins with the Gypsies.

<sup>70</sup> E. Temple Thurston, *The Flower Gloster*, 1911. p. 29-30. Cited in Hanson, *The Canal Boatmen*, p. 1.

remained everywhere the same, the Gypsies were said to be a primitive people, incapable of advancement.<sup>71</sup> The nomad was regarded as having been left behind by the rapidly progressing British society, having remained in harmony with nature, an assessment present in the work of the naturalist W.H Hudson, who was deeply attached to the romantic image of the Gypsy: 'He is to me a wild untameable animal of curious habits, and he interests me as a naturalist accordingly'.<sup>72</sup>

It would seem that almost any aspect of the nomads' lives could be drawn into romantic representations as evidence of their distinction from the people among whom they moved. When commentators employed romantic images of the nomads, descriptions of their physical appearance were an important means through which their difference from the ordinary British citizens was emphasised. The dark features of the Gypsies were presented as a sign of their exotic nature and provided a glimmer of the distant lands from which they had originated.<sup>73</sup> The Tinkers were likewise often described as being dark-skinned although in descriptions of the Scottish nomads this trait tended to be linked to their healthy outdoor life.<sup>74</sup> Often animal imagery provided a means through which to emphasise the close relationship between the nomads and the natural world as when Hudson described one nomad whom he encountered having '...eyes like a hawk'. He was 'altogether a hawk-like being, lean, wiry, alert, a perfectly wild man in a tame civilised land'.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> "Here and There: Gypsies in Surrey" in *The Surrey Leader*, 15 May 1909.

<sup>72</sup> W. H. Hudson, *A Shepard's Life. Impressions of the South Wiltshire Downs*, London: Methuen, 1910. p. 272.

<sup>73</sup> Drawings of British Gypsies with dark complexions can be found in E. Seago, *Caravan*, London: Collins, 1937.

<sup>74</sup> See P. Lynch, *Tinker Boy. A Story for Children*, London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1955. See also Dawson, *Tinker's Twa in Peace and War*, p. 73.

<sup>75</sup> Hudson, *A Shepard's Life*. p. 305.

In descriptions of the Gypsies, even their dress could provide an important means of differentiating them from the sedentary population.<sup>76</sup> In the work of romantics, the Gypsies' costume was described as elaborate, brightly coloured and ornately decorated.<sup>77</sup> Such images were particularly prominent in romantic fiction.<sup>78</sup> However, there were also those observers who claimed to be able to identify the living nomads by their clothing. The author of one magazine article in the 1930s claimed an ability to determine that a child whom he encountered was a nomad not only because of his swarthy complexion but also because, '...the big checked handkerchief round his neck proclaimed him to be a gypsy'.<sup>79</sup> Groups of nomads who were able to satisfy this aspect of the romantic stereotype could often be treated more favourably by the press than those whose costume did not mark them out from the people among whom they moved. Such was the case when a group of affluent Hungarian Coppersmith Gypsies, travelled through Britain between 1911 and 1913. The dress of these nomads was consistently remarked upon in the press, and served to flavour descriptions of them as an exotic people.<sup>80</sup> One such article described a woman in the group '...attired in rainbow-coloured vesture, her black hair was in plaits, and her neck tinkled with ornaments and charms'.<sup>81</sup> Through their adherence to romantic images of wanderers the Hungarian nomads were able to escape the extreme

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<sup>76</sup> "Epsom Gypsies" in *Daily Sketch*, 20 May 1939.

<sup>77</sup> W. Power, "The Race that Craves Freedom. How the Gypsies came to Europe" in *Glasgow News*, 16 March 1935.

<sup>78</sup> R. Croft-Cooke, "Nobelia's Stiffkat" a fictional story in *A Few Gypsies*, London: Putnam, 1955, pp. 176-184.

<sup>79</sup> M. Foster, "The Gypsy Boy" in *Education Outlook*, Spring, 1933.

<sup>80</sup> "Gipsy Romance. Wealthy Nomads at Mitcham" in *The Standard*, 27 Nov 1911.

<sup>81</sup> A. Machen, "De Omnibus Rebus. Gipsies" in ? 9 Dec 1911.



hostility faced by the less affluent German Gypsies who had arrived in Britain a few years earlier. In fact, one Glasgow newspaper reported that ‘the gipsies are far more advanced, more interesting, and more desirable than the German visitors so coldly welcomed a year or two ago’.<sup>82</sup>

In romantic representations, the ability of the nomads to exist outside the formal wage labour economy was a vital aspect of the stereotype. The nomads were portrayed as a highly skilled and productive people who used the basic materials of nature to eke out a simple livelihood. In such representations the fact that many of them participated in wage labour, particularly seasonal agricultural work, was often ignored. The key industry of the true Gypsy was seen to be that, ‘...he makes clothes pegs, hawks brooms and baskets, or deals in horses’.<sup>83</sup> Sometimes it was added that the Gypsies possessed certain supernatural skills or powers as in an article on witchcraft, which appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1936 where it was claimed that the Gypsies of Europe had the power of whispering to horses to some effect.<sup>84</sup> Similarly, R. Fuller's *The Beggar's Brotherhood*, which was published in 1936 attributed the Gypsies with mystical powers of conjuring and prognostics. It was also widely believed that Gypsies could tell fortunes and fictional accounts of the Scottish Tinkers reveal similar stereotypes.<sup>85</sup> Admiration for the skills of the nomads was not necessarily reserved for the Gypsies of fiction. Indeed, when a particular group of living nomads were able to satisfy the criteria of the romantic stereotype, through

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<sup>82</sup> “Galacian Gipsies. Arrival in Glasgow” in *Glasgow News*, 28 Nov 1911.

<sup>83</sup> “Is the Gypsy Doomed?” in *The Evening News*, 23 Nov 1906.

<sup>84</sup> C. Casalis, “Witchcraft and Herbal Remedies” in *Blackwood's Magazine*, Dec 1936. pp. 826-838.

<sup>85</sup> R. Fuller, *The Beggar's Brotherhood*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1936. p. 57. For an example of the belief in the Gypsies' ability to tell fortunes see J. Spencer, *The Northern Pageant*, Newcastle: Newcastle Chronicle, 1937. p. 149. The presentation of the Tinker as an accurate fortune

their skills at a particular handicraft or trade, they could be treated favourably by the press. In the case of the Hungarian Gypsy Coppersmiths, who engaged in the repairing of pots for local people and businesses, the press emphasised their remarkable dexterity. It was claimed that the nomads were learned in ingenious methods unknown to British coppersmiths.<sup>86</sup>

The customs and traditions of the nomads were also often drawn into romantic representations. Wherever the traditions of the Gypsies were perceived to deviate from those of sedentary society, commentators drew on this distinction as evidence of their exotic and mysterious nature.<sup>87</sup> In this regard ceremonies of the Gypsies such as ‘coronations’, weddings and funerals received a great deal of attention from the press. These reports often included extraordinary headlines, taking aspects of the event out of context in order to capture the imagination of the public.<sup>88</sup> Hence in 1911 the funeral of a young Gypsy woman was watched with interest. Though reports varied wildly in factual content, all seemed to remark on the elaborate rituals carried out during the ceremony. One newspaper told of the way in which the woman’s body was ‘...dressed in fine clothes and loaded with jewels’. Another account emphasised the ‘...wailing and mystic prayers’ said to have occurred during the service. A further report speculated about a Gypsy custom of placing soap and a comb in the coffin of

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teller can be found in Paton, *The Tinker’s Warning. A One Act Scots Play*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>86</sup> “The Galacian Gipsies. Skill as Coppersmiths” in *Croydon Express*, 28 Oct 1911.

<sup>87</sup> “New King of the Gipsies” in *Morning Post*, 5 July 1937. See also “The Gypsies Their History, Character and Customs” in *Southport Guardian*, 19 Feb 1910.

<sup>88</sup> See for example “Married By Jumping Over Broom” in *Daily Chronicle*, 18 Jan 1912. Press speculation about unusual marriage rituals was not unique to the Gypsies and similar reports can be found concerning marriages among railway Navvies. See, T. Coleman, *The Railway Navvies. A history of the men who made the railways*, London: Hutchinson and Co., 1965. p. 166.

the dead person.<sup>89</sup> The burning of the caravans of dead relatives by Gypsies also caught the attention of the press. Such reports tended to ignore the many practical reasons, which may have explained such practices, and instead speculated that the burning was due to the fear that ‘...the ghost of the dead person would return and haunt it’.<sup>90</sup> Similarly, in the reporting of Gypsy wedding customs, the more unusual rituals were the ones that were emphasised. Headlines such as ‘Married Jumping over A Broom’ were intended to catch the public attention.<sup>91</sup> The way in which the press reported on the customs of the Gypsies, no doubt, often endowing them with wild exaggerations, were intended to underline the cultural distinction of the Gypsies from the sedentary population.

Romantic stereotypes of the Gypsies not only assigned a distinct set of physical and behavioural characteristics to the nomads but also attributed them an important relationship to the sedentary population. During the early twentieth century, life in the countryside was idealised by many people.<sup>92</sup> At the turn of the century many scholars feared that a process of physical degeneration was underway among the British city dwellers. It was widely believed that ill health was caused by life in the towns and that fresh air and time in the countryside were beneficial. To an extent, such beliefs developed into a cult-like movement through which many individuals expressed their longing to return to the simple life. Throughout the early twentieth century the romantic image of the Gypsy with his tent or caravan was perceived as

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<sup>89</sup> First quotation taken from “Gypsy Funeral Scene” in *Daily News*, 16 Oct 1911. Second quotation taken from “Gipsy Funeral” in *Morning Leader*, 16 Oct 1911. Third quotation taken from “Gipsy Funeral” in *Daily Express*, 16 Oct 1911.

<sup>90</sup> “Caravans Set on Fire” in *Daily Chronicle*, 18 Jan 1912.

<sup>91</sup> See for example “Married By Jumping Over Broom” in *Daily Chronicle*, 18 Jan 1912.

<sup>92</sup> J. Stevenson, *British Society 1914-45*, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1984. p. 392.

being intrinsically linked to the simple life.<sup>93</sup> In 1935, one newspaper, reflecting this interest, reported that:

The Gypsy at his purest and freest is a supreme master of natural, zestful living...At their best they are the handsomest and hardiest specimens of the human race.<sup>94</sup>

It was sometimes claimed that the Gypsies were immune to the many diseases which were an ever-present threat to town and city dwellers. Often, even where Gypsies were portrayed negatively, authors would concede that their way of life guaranteed they had a strong constitution. In 1908, for instance, the *Golden Penny Magazine* claimed that, ‘...in spite of the absolute insanitary conditions in which the gipsy lives, plague, cholera or any other epidemic will carry off the whole of the neighbouring population before it will touch him’.<sup>95</sup>

The Gypsies were believed to be the true masters of the countryside and, as such, they provided a vital link between industrialised man and the natural world at a time when a great many people had been born and raised in the towns and cities. This emphasis appeared in a newspaper article written in 1910 which asserted that, ‘...the gipsy [performs] a useful function in our society, in that he reminds us that men may become too tame and over-disciplined’.<sup>96</sup> This affinity the nomads were considered to have with the countryside is particularly well illustrated by a poem written about the

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<sup>93</sup> N. Wilson, *Gypsies and Gentlemen. The Life and Times of the Leisure Caravan*, London: Columbus Books, 1986.

<sup>94</sup>“Race that Craves Freedom: How the Gypsies came to Europe” in *Glasgow News*, 16 March 1935.

<sup>95</sup>“Gipsy and Jew: A Parallel” in *The Golden Penny*, Oct 1908.

<sup>96</sup> “Should the Gipsy be Abolished?” in *Public Opinion*, 17 June 1910.

Scottish Tinkers in 1921:

I'm a tinker king an' the woods are mine,  
An' the fir trees wave for me,  
An the mosses grow wherever I go,  
An' my way is Liberty.  
I track the deer to the deepest shades,  
Frae screich o' day till the red sky fades,  
For Chance and Luck are fickle ways,  
So I tak' what comes to me.

I'm a tinker king an' the sky is mine,  
An' the sunshine shines for me,  
An' the stars are lit as my lair I quit,  
To roam my gait sae free.  
Or the night may be mirk an' the win' may roar,  
Or the snow clouds roll an' toss an' lower  
Like the steaming breath o' te Thunderer Thor  
As it wisps roun' the mountain scree.

I'm a tinker king and the day is mine,  
Frae the first faint licht I see,  
An' the hours grow fu' o' o'thing new  
As they drap frae Heaven to me;  
For the tinker's luck the day his born  
Is to laugh the gauds o' the warl to scorn,  
For life's but a span frae nicht to morn,  
But love's Infinity.

I'm a tinker King an' the warl is mine,  
For my lass waits there for me,  
An' I wadna change in a' the range  
O' the belles o' Christendy;  
For the tinker fears nae the wide warl's pride  
Wi' youth an' a lass an' love at his side.  
His El Dorado land is wide  
As the hale o' Earth an Sea.

Then Hip Hurrah! For the tinker King!  
Naw Gairter star has he,  
An you wadna find his Coat o' Arms  
In the hale o' Heraldry.  
For the tinker King is first a man  
An' the Kings but a man wi' a' his lan.'  
An' I've seen in my time a thorne in pawn.  
There's Kings wad change wi' me, wi' me,  
A tinker King like me!<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> "The Tinker King" in Dawson, *The Tinker's Twa in Peace and War*, p. 17.

The perception of the Gypsies as a link between man and his pre-industrial past remained important in literary circles throughout the early twentieth century. The poet John Masefield was deeply attached to the romantic image of the Gypsy and employed images of nomads wandering free, scorned and rejected but without the anxieties of modern life.<sup>98</sup> Similarly, although he often condemned loafers and wanderers, Rudyard Kipling, who was part of the imperialist rather than the romantic tradition, showed a deep sympathy for the nomadic way of life in poems such as *Gipsy Vans* and *The Gipsy Trail*.<sup>99</sup> A significant volume of popular fiction dealing with the romance of life on the road was also published during this period.<sup>100</sup>

It was often suggested that from the simple life there emerged finer art than the more elaborate products of the industrialised middle classes.<sup>101</sup> It was for this reason that the Welsh poet W.H. Davies, author of *Autobiography of a Super-Tramp*, was held in great esteem by many writers.<sup>102</sup> As a tramp who had become a poet, Davies's story was a romantic one.<sup>103</sup> He was widely believed to be living proof that the simple life was the good life and that vagabondage and natural living were important stimulants for creative imagination.<sup>104</sup> The ideal of the bohemian artist became more established during the early twentieth century and those who sought to

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<sup>98</sup> H. Blamires, *Twentieth Century English Literature*, London: Macmillan, 1982. p. 13.

<sup>99</sup> A. Wilson, *The Strange Ride of Rudyard Kipling. His Life and Work*, London: Seeker and Warburg, 1977. p. 158.

<sup>100</sup> See for example J. Farnol, *The Broad Highway. A Romance of Kent*, London: Sampson Low, 1910  
J. W. Locke, *Beloved Vagabond*, London: John Lane, 1906.

<sup>101</sup> J. Marsh, *Edward Thomas. A Poet for his Country*, London: Paul Elek, 1978. pp. 46-47.

<sup>102</sup> W. Davies, *The Autobiography of a Super-Tramp*, London: A.C. Fifield, (2nd edition) 1908.

<sup>103</sup> A. Rickett, *The Vagabond in Literature*, London: J.M Dent and Co, 1906. p. 15.

<sup>104</sup> M. Biddiss, *The Age of the Masses. Ideas and Society in Europe Since 1870*, Middlesex: Penguin, 1977. p. 155.

get closer to nature, often attempted to do so by impersonating the Gypsy of the romantic stereotype.<sup>105</sup> The artist Augustus John attempted to model his character and way of life on that of a Gypsy. Similarly Dame Laura Knight, believed it was vital to spend time ‘joining their wanderings and learning the mind behind the mask’.<sup>106</sup>

During the First World War the symbol of the nomad with his intimate links with the countryside became particularly important. Indeed, in 1915 the first issue of a new magazine entitled *The Gypsy* went to the press. The magazine featured the work of artists and poets on the countryside and the second issue included an artist’s impression of the character of Isopel from George Borrow’s *Lavengro* by P. Nash.<sup>107</sup> The editors justified the production of such a magazine at a time when the world was at war by arguing that ‘...it is good for England...that there...are those about this world of ours who know what the world is’.<sup>108</sup> Elsewhere, the image of the country life of the nomad was employed as a contrast to life at the Front. In a book of poetry entitled *Tinker’s Twa in Peace and War*, the author May Dawson used just such a technique to emphasise the way in which patriotism was born out of a love for the countryside.<sup>109</sup>

However, this interest in getting back in touch with nature went beyond the literary world; and the perception of the Gypsies as gatekeepers to the simple life also

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<sup>105</sup> W. Wilkinson, *Vagabonds and Puppets*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1933.

<sup>106</sup> W. Carp, “Gipsy Life on Canvas: Dame Laura Knight’s Exhibition” In *Daily Telegraph*, April 17 1939.

<sup>107</sup> P. Nash, Picture of “Lavengro and Isopel in the Dingle” in *The Gypsy*, May 1916, Vol. 2. No. 2. pp. 99.

<sup>108</sup> “Editorial” in *The Gypsy*, May 1915. Vol. 1. No. 1. P. 5.

<sup>109</sup> “The Tinker’s in France” in Dawson, *Tinkers Twa in Peace and War*, p. 73.

penetrated popular culture.<sup>110</sup> In the years following the war the wish to escape the hectic life of the towns and move closer to nature by following the life of the Gypsy came to be reflected in a multitude of magazine features and newspaper articles on the benefits of camping and caravanning.<sup>111</sup> It was suggested that there existed a wild Gypsy strain in most people: ‘...the strain that makes the city clerk camp out during his fortnights holiday, or sends the Government official climbing up lonely peaks’.<sup>112</sup> Caravanning became an increasingly popular pastime among the better off and hiking, climbing and rambling also soared in popularity, particularly during the 1930s.<sup>113</sup> In reflecting this vogue in leisure pursuits Bertrum Smith, a caravan-maker who also wrote books on caravanning, divided people into three categories ‘those who can caravan, those who can’t and a small group of true nomads, and vagabonds, who must.’<sup>114</sup>

This link between the Gypsies and the countryside was also evident when during the 1930s, the B.B.C employed the Reverend George Bramwell Evens, the nephew of Gypsy evangelist Rodney Smith, as a radio broadcaster during *Children’s Hour* under the alias ‘Romany’. In his programme *Out with Romany*, Evens accompanied the listeners on long walks through the countryside during which he

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<sup>110</sup> The development of a common culture in Britain is discussed in J. Stevenson, *British society 1914-45*, p. 381.

<sup>111</sup> See for example B. Smith “The Complete Caravan” In *Country Life*, 21 July 1906. The increased use of caravans for holiday making by the sedentary population is examined in B. Haley, *The Healthy Body and Victorian Culture*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978. pp. 33-34. See also C. Ward-Jackson and D. Harvey, *The English Gypsy Caravan*, Newton Abbot, Devon: David and Charles, 1972. pp. 44-46.

<sup>112</sup> “Should the Gipsy be Abolished?” in *Public Opinion*, 17 June 1910.

<sup>113</sup> “A Fashion for Ballooning and Caravanning” in *Brighton Standard*, 18 June 1907. “The Delights of Gypsy Life” in *The Mirror*, 19 June 1907.

<sup>114</sup> B. Smith, *The Whole Art of Caravanning*, quoted in Wilson, *Gypsies and Gentlemen*. p. 87.



introduced them to a variety of wildlife and when he often spoke of his affinity to the countryside as being grounded in nature.<sup>115</sup>

It is my ancestry that makes me a roamer, and like a bird  
hearing its migratory calls, I am lured from the city to the  
woods and fields.<sup>116</sup>

The fifty-minute programme proved immensely popular and attracted millions of adult and child listeners. The idea of an innate affinity between the nomads and the countryside was also evident in popular fiction and such images can be found in numerous works of varying quality published during the early twentieth century.<sup>117</sup> In one fictional account the main character, a Scottish nomad proclaimed that: ‘I am a tinker, you see, a man of the roads and the heather - it is in my blood - and I could not settle down in a house’.<sup>118</sup>

The life of the Gypsy was not only viewed as a means through which the city-dweller could re-visited his pre-industrial roots but was also often regarded as a means of escape from the industrial cities. It was felt: ‘...we are prisoners of our houses, our work, our habits, our possessions’.<sup>119</sup> By contrast, the itinerant life of the Gypsy was perceived as a positive freedom, a choice of non-conformity to the ways of industrial society. Therefore nomadism provided an attractive model to many of

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<sup>115</sup> E. Evens, *Through the Years with Romany*, London: University of London Press, 1946. “Following in Romany’s Footsteps” in *Evening Courier*, 22 April 1989.

<sup>116</sup> G. Evens, *The Spirit of Romany. The Naturalist and Broadcaster Revealed by his Sayings and Writings*, Compiled by H. Gee, London: St Hugh’s Press, 1949. p. 22.

<sup>117</sup> See for example D. Ratcliffe, *Gypsy Doreilia. A Story Play in Three Acts*, London: John Lane, 1932. E. Lister, *The Gypsy Life of Betsy Wood*, London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1926.

<sup>118</sup> Tranter, *Tinker’s Pride*, p. 203.

<sup>119</sup> “Race that Craves Freedom: How the Gypsies came to Europe” in *Glasgow News*, 16 March 1935.

those who felt dissatisfied with the industrial cities.<sup>120</sup> This idea that the wandering life of the Gypsies could awaken town-dwellers to their incarceration was employed by D.H. Lawrence in *The Virgin and the Gypsy* where the image of the Gypsy was used in an assault on the industrial middle-classes and a parable for regeneration.<sup>121</sup> Lawrence placed the unimpeded and untameable spirit of the countryside, personified by the Gypsy, in direct opposition to a stale bourgeois existence.<sup>122</sup> The idea of Gypsy life as a form of escape retained a cultural importance and during the Second World War was again employed as a form of retreat from war in the work of artist Edward Seago.<sup>123</sup>

Romantic images of Gypsies in early twentieth century British society were the vehicle of expression for a distinct set of ideals, aspirations and fears of sedentary society. Such images tended to be projected in abstract or fictional form and were only occasionally used to describe the real groups of nomads encountered by the press. However, such romantic images were invariably presented as being accurate portrayals of the character, way of life and pattern of behaviour of the Gypsies and so could render those nomads who did not conform to them, vulnerable to hostility at the local level.

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<sup>120</sup> N. Ragnar, *The Wandering Spirit: A Study of Human Migration*, London: Macmillan, 1937. p. 278. The idea of running away with the Gypsies was a romantic sentiment which was often employed in fiction. Elsewhere the claim was used to give authority to accounts of the Gypsies by emphasising an individuals intimacy with them. See J. Yoors, *The Gypsies*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967.

<sup>121</sup> J. Turner, "Purity and Danger in D.H. Lawrence's *The Virgin and the Gypsy*" in D. Ellis, and O. De Zordo, *D.H. Lawrence. Critical Assessments*, Vol. III, Helm Information: Mountfield, 1992. pp. 388-405. See also R. Gekoski, "Freud and English Literature 1900-1930" in M. Bell, (ed.), *The Context of English Literature 1900-1930*, London: Methuen and Co, 1980. p. 209.

<sup>122</sup> A. Crowder, and L. Crowder, "Mythic Intent in D.H. Lawrence's *The Virgin and the Gypsy*" in D. Ellis, and O. De Zordo, *D.H. Lawrence. Critical Assessments*, Vol. III, pp. 384-388.

<sup>123</sup> E. Seago, *Peace in War*, London: Collins, 1943.

### **A Degenerate People**

There was, therefore, a deep sentimental attachment to the romantic image of the Gypsy in early twentieth century British society. As a result, there was a simultaneous interest in exonerating the romantic Gypsy from the charges levelled at the nomads. In focusing on this distinction throughout the early twentieth century commentators on the Gypsies drew upon the ideas of racial hierarchy and racial degeneration which had been employed as a mechanism to reconcile the two contradictory stereotypes during the previous century.<sup>124</sup> It was also often suggested that the 'true' Gypsies were becoming scarce and were being replaced by '...a new race of wanderers' who had lost the worthy characteristics of their ancestors.<sup>125</sup> It was believed that the Gypsies had 'come down in life'.<sup>126</sup> Marriages between Gypsies and non-Gypsies were regarded as responsible for the problems which had been caused by these 'pseudo-gipsies'.<sup>127</sup> In the case of the so-called true Romanies, it was believed that since they were a primitive people they should be allowed to continue with their traditional modes of existence. As for the majority of nomads to be found on the roads, it was claimed that: '...it is a matter of regret that these wanderers are not genuine Romanies, who are fast dying out in England'.<sup>128</sup> And it was no large step from here to suggest they should be treated accordingly.

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<sup>124</sup> See D. Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth Century Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. pp. 71-95.

<sup>125</sup>"The gipsy: Not a romantic figure nowadays" in *Bridlington Free Press*, 8 August 1934.

<sup>126</sup> Captain J. Haggard cited in "Reservation Camp for Gypsies?" in *Southend Standard*, 11 April 1935.

<sup>127</sup> Captain J. Haggard cited in "Reservation Camp for Gypsies?" in *Southend Standard*, 11 April 1935.

<sup>128</sup>"Here and There: Gypsies in Surrey" in *The Surrey Leader*, 15 May 1909.

The idea of racial degeneration among the nomads reflected more than simply a mechanism to explain the discrepancy between the two stereotypes. The assumption that the romantic Gypsy was vulnerable was also intrinsically linked to wider fears about the loss of the countryside amidst the rapidly growing urban centres.<sup>129</sup> During the late nineteenth century writers such as Sir George Douglas had begun to write of the degeneration of the Gypsy as a parallel to the ‘...elimination of romance and picturesqueness from our lives’.<sup>130</sup> In short, the idea that the purity of the Gypsy was threatened, became a means through which to explore the consequences of industrial capitalism. It was against this background that Edward Thomas wrote of his fear of the effect which the threat of eviction and the loss of common land could have on the spirit of the wanderers. At its worst he feared the fate of the Gypsies was to be ‘driven from parish to parish, and finally settle down as squalid and degenerate nomads in the town where they lose what beauty and courage they had’.<sup>131</sup>

The discrepancy between romantic and antipathetic images was explained in terms of the degeneration of the Gypsies. The idea that there existed a racial hierarchy among nomadic people and that the appearance, moral character and behaviour of particular groups of travellers would correspond exactly to the place which they occupied within that hierarchy, was employed by those who adhered to both romantic and negative stereotypes. The assumptions of hierarchy invoked by the press or in literature were rarely as pronounced as those emphasised in the work of the Gypsy

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<sup>129</sup> G. Behlmer, “The Gypsy Problem in Victorian England” in *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 28, No 2, 1985, pp. 231-253.

<sup>130</sup> Sir G. Douglas, *Diversions of a Country Gentleman*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. London: Hodder and Stroughton, 1902.

<sup>131</sup> E. Thomas, cited in A. Motion, *The Poetry of Edward Thomas*, London: The Howgarth Press, 1991. p. 142.

Lore Society.<sup>132</sup> However, sympathy with the idea of a nomadic hierarchy can be located in the work of many commentators on the Gypsies.

W. H. Hudson, for example attempted to give validity to a description of a 'true' Gypsy by emphasising the way in which the nomad conformed to accepted romantic images and by adding that the Gypsy was not '...one of those blue-eyed and red or light-haired bastard gipsies'.<sup>133</sup> This use of the claim that a particular nomad was a true Gypsy to give validity to a romantic account of a wanderer even penetrated children's fiction and a number of children's authors who used romantic Gypsy characters during the early twentieth century took great pains to show that the Gypsies of their stories were the 'true' Romanies by differentiating them from the so-called 'mumpers' and tramps.<sup>134</sup> Commentators who adhered to negative stereotypes of the Gypsies also frequently included an indication of the place which they believed the wanderers held within the nomadic hierarchy. An example of this treatment of the Gypsies can be read in 1910 when a Bournemouth newspaper reported on a group of nomads who had been the cause of numerous complaints in the locality. The report assigned these Gypsies a low place in the nomadic hierarchy by reminding readers that '...one has to keep in mind the distinction between the unlovely tramp and the genuine and reasonably honest and picturesque gipsy'.<sup>135</sup> Elsewhere the idea of a hierarchy of nomadic people, which included groups who were inferior to the 'true' Gypsies and who embodied the qualities of the negative stereotype, was used to

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<sup>132</sup> The way in which the Gypsy Lore Society responded to the nomads during the early twentieth century is discussed in chapter five of the thesis.

<sup>133</sup> Hudson, *A Shepard's Life*. p. 305.

<sup>134</sup> See for example D. Portbury, *Egypt Lane*, London: Cassell, 1935. pp. 5 and 9. See also G. Imlach *Freda's fortune, A book for Girls*, London: T.C and E.C Jack, 1907. p. 11.

<sup>135</sup> "Problem of the Gipsy" in *Bournemouth Gazette*, 22 Oct 1910.

justify antipathy.<sup>136</sup> When in 1923 the paintings of A. Neville Lewis on *Gypsy Life* went on public display, the art critic for *The Times*, who reported on the collection, praised the way in which the artist ‘...flings them at you in all their dirt, their ugliness, their occasional semi-idiocy’.<sup>137</sup> However, when a complaint was made about the critic’s use of such derogatory terms in reference to the nomads, he drew upon the idea of a nomadic hierarchy to justify his assertions.<sup>138</sup> The critic retorted that the ‘...error probably lies in the artist’s use of the word ‘gipsy’...in many country places there are families of ugly, and half-idiotic squatters who pass for gipsies but probably have no right to the name’.<sup>139</sup> In this way even those who employed the most derogatory images of Gypsies could make use of ideas of degeneration to deflect criticism of their work.

The existence of negative stereotypes, and the fact that these could plausibly be attributed to certain sectors of the nomadic population while others were exonerated, induced travellers concerned over their own social position to reinforce belief in a nomadic hierarchy. In keeping with this response, during the early twentieth century, the Showman’s Guild was anxious to disassociate itself from the Gypsies of the negative stereotype as when George Sanger wrote in his autobiography; ‘...showmen proper always kept themselves apart from the gipsies’ and in fact ‘rather looked down upon them’.<sup>140</sup> Similarly, there are examples of groups of Gypsies claiming that they were the true Gypsies of the romantic stereotype

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<sup>136</sup> See for example, Anon, Letter to the *Times*, 19 April 1923.

<sup>137</sup> See for example, Anon, Letter to the *Times*, 19 April 1923.

<sup>138</sup> Letter from F. Smith to *The Times*, 13 April 1923.

<sup>139</sup> “A Gipsy’s Education” Letter to the editor of *The Times* from A. Neville Lewis, 20 April 1923.

<sup>140</sup> G. Sanger, *Seventy Years a Showman*, London: C. Arthur Pearson, 1907. p. 46.

and that it was another group of nomads who had the attributes of the negative stereotype.<sup>141</sup> There is also evidence of the presence of foreign Gypsies evoking antipathy from British nomads in the same way that hostility towards the foreign nomads was generated among members of sedentary society. It was said that when a group of German Gypsies camped on a site in Blackpool in 1906, the nearby British Gypsies referred to them as ‘...nasty poverty furiners’. It was also claimed that, when the German nomads were evicted, ‘yells of delight’ could be heard from the British Gypsies’ camp.<sup>142</sup> A further instance in which expressions of hostility towards foreign Gypsies were made by British Gypsies occurred in 1904 when the Gypsies encamped on the Black Patch near Birmingham, who were themselves threatened with eviction, refused to allow a group of foreign Gypsies to use the site.<sup>143</sup> Such evidence testifies to the power of prevailing ideas of a nomadic hierarchy. Not only did such ideas serve to validate both romantic and negative representations of the nomads to the benefit of sedentary society but they also provoked suspicion and hostilities within the nomadic population which ultimately served to reinforce the belief in the existence of a nomadic hierarchy. Groups of Gypsies concerned over their own social position in Britain were unlikely to extend the arm of friendship towards other groups if they believed they were less desirable than themselves.

The factors which were assumed to determine whether a particular group of Gypsies occupied a high or low position in the nomadic hierarchy varied wildly in

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<sup>141</sup> One such example is cited in A. McCormick, *The Tinkler Gypsies*, Dumfries: J. Maxwell and Son, 1907, p. 465.

<sup>142</sup> D. Yates, *My Gypsy Days: Recollections of a Romany Rawnie*, London: Phoenix House, 1953. pp. 37 and 41. Spelling as in original.

<sup>143</sup> Taken from an article in *The Daily Graphic*, 13 Oct 1904. See T. H. Thompson, “Affairs of Egypt 1892-1906” in *JGLS*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Series, 1908. Vol. I. pp. 369.

different accounts. In the work of those who claimed to have an understanding of the character and way of life of the true Gypsies, factors such as a knowledge of the Romani language or a particular outlook on life were often taken to be the signs of a true Gypsy.<sup>144</sup> The artist Edward Seago, for example, claimed that the ‘didikais’ or ‘gorgio’ nomads should be distinguished from the true Romanies because they did not possess the same knowledge of the wild or philosophy of life.<sup>145</sup> However, more frequently commentators searched for outward signs that a particular group of Gypsies conformed to the romantic stereotype and took this detail as evidence of their place within the nomadic hierarchy. In a short fictional account by Rupert Croft-Cooke the identity of a Gypsy was confirmed by her dress: ‘...there was a glimmer of gold about her which was an indication that she was no hedge hopping mumper but a gypsy of substance; earrings, broach, rings were all heavy and golden’.<sup>146</sup> Thus outward conformity to romantic stereotypes of the ‘true’ Gypsies, could also be important in determining the way in which groups of living nomads were received by sedentary society.

Ideas about the degeneration of the Gypsies could be expressed not only in terms of a racial phenomenon but also as a social, moral or economic trend. Indeed, signs of social and economic change within the Gypsy population were often taken as evidence in support of the view that they were degenerating. A particularly graphic example of this process grew out of the fact that since the mid-nineteenth century a number of changes had occurred in the labour patterns of the nomads. With the

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<sup>144</sup> *Select Committee [HL] on Moveable Dwellings., Minutes of Evidence*, of Reginald Farrar, Medical Inspector of the Local Government Board, para. 422.

<sup>145</sup> E. Seago, *Caravan*,

<sup>146</sup> R. Croft-Cooke, “Nobelia’s Stiffkat” a fictional story in *A Few Gypsies*, pp. 176-184.



increase in mass-produced cheap goods, handicrafts had suffered a decline in profitability and there appears to have been a shift among the nomads towards the hawking of manufactured goods and later scrap metal dealing.<sup>147</sup> Though such changes merely paralleled wider trends in the industrialised economy, it was often suggested that the once romantic figure of nature had degenerated and was now nothing more than ‘...a keen business man’ with a ‘persuasive tongue’.<sup>148</sup> During the 1930s the press mourned the loss of the ‘true’ Gypsies who had been ‘...very clever in the making and selling of brooms, brushes, wicker work, tin ware, natural grown walking sticks and in particular clothes pegs, for which they found a ready market’.<sup>149</sup> There was a feeling that the Gypsies, once a highly industrious and productive people skilled in handicrafts, had degenerated into a class of parasites living off the industry of others.<sup>150</sup> In the case of the Tinkers too, the claim was made that the pretence of hawking of manufactured goods was simply an excuse to beg and that they no longer contributed anything to the wealth of the country.<sup>151</sup> On occasion the idea that the nomads were becoming less industrious and therefore more troublesome became tied up with the belief that there existed many half-breed Gypsies who did not possess the honourable qualities of their romantic ancestors and were instead a menace to society.<sup>152</sup> Wherever nomads modernised or adapted their work patterns they became

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<sup>147</sup> Changes in the labour patterns of the Gypsies which reflected wider trends in the process of industrialisation in Britain are considered in Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth Century Society*, p. 66. An account of moving from horse-dealing to scrap metal dealing during the late 1920s is given by S. Boswell, *The Book of Boswell: Autobiography of a Gypsy*, (ed) John Seymour, London: Victor Gollancz, 1970. p. 54.

<sup>148</sup> “The gipsy: Not a romantic figure nowadays” in *Bridlington Free Press*, 8 August 1934.

<sup>149</sup> “The gipsy: Not a romantic figure nowadays” in *Bridlington Free Press*, 8 August 1934.

<sup>150</sup> *Report of the Committee on Vagrancy in Scotland*, (1936). para. 91.

<sup>151</sup> Witness statement of Mr N. Hill, Former General Secretary to the Scottish N.S.P.C.C, cited in *Report of the Committee on the Tinkers of Scotland*, (1918). para. 64.

<sup>152</sup> R. Croft-Cooke, *A Few Gypsies*, p. 113. See also “The Children’s Bill and the Gypsies” Letter from A. E. Gillington to *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Nov 19 1908.

susceptible to the accusation that they were, ‘...not genuine Romanies...but rather the flotsam and jetsam of humanity who are constitutionally unable to follow any regular from of employment’.<sup>153</sup>

A further example of modernisation and social change among the nomadic populations being interpreted as a sign of degeneration occurred during the 1930s, when the increased use of motor vehicles by Gypsies incited popular speculation that they were not the romantic Romany wanderers of the past.<sup>154</sup> Reports of the use of motor vehicles by the nomads were invariably unfavourable. An article on the Epsom Derby in 1939 which asserted that the nomads had ‘...made the mistake of going modern...using cars instead of picturesque caravans, trying to dispense with tradition’ is merely one example.<sup>155</sup> The author claimed that the crowds took little interest in the Gypsies who were now ordinary folk and little different from themselves. It was claimed that visitors to the Derby were unwilling to pay for the services of fortune-tellers and to purchase lucky charms in the old Derby tradition. Similar attitudes were expressed towards the Tinkers. Newspapers included nostalgic accounts of the way in which the group were welcomed by the sedentary populations in the days before they began to travel in expensive motor cars.<sup>156</sup> In this way signs of change within the nomadic community often led them to be portrayed negatively. The nomads were widely understood to be a primitive people who would always remain close to nature. Thus such developments were perceived to be an unnatural phenomena and

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<sup>153</sup>“Here and There: Gypsies in Surrey” in *The Surrey Leader*, 15 May 1909.

<sup>154</sup> Changes in the style of Gypsy caravans during the twentieth century are considered in D. Harvey, *The Gypsies Wagon-time and After*, London: Batsford, 1979.

<sup>155</sup> “Gypsy Caravans” in *Daily Sketch*, 20 May 1939.

<sup>156</sup> This trend has continued throughout the twentieth century. For a recent example see “They Were Welcomed” in *The Dundee Courier*, 22 Oct 1980.

interpreted as a sign of degeneration.<sup>157</sup> It was believed that if the nomads persisted in their changes they would lose their romantic qualities completely and become indistinguishable from the lowest elements of the sedentary population.

The discrepancy between romantic and antipathetic images of the Gypsies was widely understood to be the consequence of a process of degeneration, which had occurred among them. This understanding of the two stereotypes enabled those who adhered to romantic images of wanderers to exonerate a theoretical group of 'true' Gypsies from the charges of the negative stereotype. However, outside the work of the Gypsy Lore Society, groups of living nomads encountered by members of sedentary society were rarely perceived in terms of a romantic and picturesque people. More often, when it came to commenting on the character and way of life of groups of Gypsies in a particular area, the negative stereotype reigned supreme.

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<sup>157</sup> R. Croft-Cooke, *A Few Gypsies*, p. 113.



(2. A postcard of a Scottish itinerant and his young daughter at work by the roadside. Increasingly during the early twentieth century it was suggested that such occupations were dying out and that those who followed an itinerant way of life had come to pose a nuisance to society.)

### Summary

The representations of the Gypsy in early twentieth century society do not mark a significant departure from those images of Gypsies and of nomadism that can be found in the work of eighteenth and nineteenth century commentators. Many of the negative stereotypes of the Gypsies had undergone little change since the days of Mayhew. The fact that idleness, irreligion, insanitary habits, violence and criminality, continued to be presented as the keynotes of the Gypsies' character illustrates the extent to which hostility towards nomadism had become entrenched in the public mind. The romantic stereotypes of the Gypsy have also shown themselves to be resilient and adaptable to the changing needs of the industrial society.

A central concern of this chapter has been the issue of race and the way in which stereotypes of the Gypsies were projected as racial traits. It is clear that the way in which the two contrary stereotypes of the Gypsies could be reconciled through the doctrine of race profoundly affected responses to Gypsies during the period under review. However, the evidence in this chapter reveals that arguments about the degeneration of the Gypsies were not intrinsically dependent on theories of race. The stereotypes could be, and, on occasion were, reconciled through arguments of social or economic degeneration. Although the image of the degenerating Gypsy was frequently drawn upon, it was not essential.

By the beginning of the twentieth century the image of Gypsies as a group with distinct characteristics that set them aside from the sedentary population was planted firmly in the public mind. This image continued to be reaffirmed by commentators on the nomads at every level of society. Representations of the Gypsies often bore little relation to the reality of the people or their way of life. However, the images were used to justify antipathy and enable sedentary society to cling to its potential escape route from the complex industrial society. The fact that both romantic and antipathetic commentators used sensationalism, romanticism, exaggeration and generalisation in their presentations of nomads is highly significant. During the early twentieth century such mediums as newspapers, magazines, radio art and encyclopaedias were the chief means through which the majority of people learned about groups such as Gypsies with whom many of them would rarely come into contact.

## ***Part Two***

## Chapter Three

### Legislative Responses

The State's approach to Gypsies in early twentieth century Britain was to a great extent shaped by the perceptions of Gypsy identity and the stereotypes of the group which were then in circulation. The Governments did not follow their counterparts elsewhere in Europe in implementing barbaric measures in dealing with nomadic groups.<sup>1</sup> However, at the same time, British legislation enabled local authorities to pursue policies involving the sustained persecution and harassment of the travellers. During the early twentieth century, a catalogue of measures were introduced which enabled local authorities to control and regulate the living spaces and use of land by nomads. Successive Governments demonstrated that they did not wish to be associated with a repressive stance towards the wandering life and the more severe proposals for legislation dealing specifically with the Gypsies were blocked by the Home Office. However, pressure groups both within and outside parliament favoured a more openly repressive and assimilationist approach. Thus, even in instances where proposed legislation never came into force, the debates surrounding such proposals often provide insights into the prevailing beliefs on Gypsies during the period.

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<sup>1</sup> An examination of the treatment of Gypsies elsewhere in Europe can be found in D. Kenrick, and G. Puxon, *The Destiny of Europe's Gypsies*, London: Sussex University Press, 1972. See also D. Crowe and J. Kolsti, *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe*, New York, M. E. Sharpe, 1991. See also A. Fraser, *The Gypsies*, Oxford: Basil: Blackwell Publishers, 1992; and also J. Liégeois, *Gypsies: An Illustrated History*, London: Al Saqi Books, 1986.

In pursuing the response of the State the following themes are considered: Gypsy immigration, vagrancy legislation, the 1908 Children's Act, the Moveable Dwellings campaigns, the State and the Scottish Tinkers and finally, issues relating to health, housing and town planning in which the Gypsies became caught up. An effort has been made to consider these themes in a chronological sequence although where debates continued over several decades it has been necessary to move forwards through time to trace their development and return later to earlier periods to consider separate themes.

### **Gypsy Immigration**



(3. A postcard showing German Gypsies being escorted through Dingwall by police. c. 1906)

The first major incident to bring the Gypsies to the attention of parliament in the twentieth century occurred between 1904 and 1906. It involved the arrival of a group of



Gypsies believed to be German or Macedonian. The migration of small bands of Gypsies to Britain from elsewhere in Europe was nothing new. In fact, a small group of Serbian Gypsies were reported to have arrived in Britain from France in 1903.<sup>2</sup> However, a number of factors conspired against the arrivals of 1904 who became caught up in the debates then raging within parliament over the need to ban undesirable aliens from entering the country which led ultimately to the passage of the 1905 Aliens Act under the Conservative Government.<sup>3</sup> The fact that the Gypsies who entered Britain between 1904 and 1906, though initially thought to be Macedonian, came to be regarded as German, played a significant part in raising the profile of the group. Anglo-German relations were under-going a period of rapid deterioration at this time and the Gypsies therefore fell victim not only with popular hostility towards nomadism, but also in view of the prevailing antipathy towards Germans and Germany.<sup>4</sup> Economic factors also came into play. It would appear that the more impoverished a band of foreign Gypsies, the more likely that the 'undesirable' nature of the group would be brought to the attention of parliament.<sup>5</sup>

The first group of German Gypsies arrived in 1904 and despite being economically self-sufficient and expressing no interest in remaining permanently in Britain, they found themselves harried from county to county by police anxious to ensure that they did not settle

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<sup>2</sup> For details of the serbian Gypsies who arrived in Britain in 1903 see T. H Crofton "Affairs of Egypt 1892-1906" in *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Series, April 1908, Vol. I. p. 367.

<sup>3</sup> See C. Holmes, "The German Gypsy Question in Britain 1904-06" in K. Lunn (ed.) *Hosts Immigrants and Minorities: Historical Responses to Newcomers in British Society*, Dawson: Folkstone, 1980. pp. 134-159.

<sup>4</sup> D. Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969. pp. 240-1.

<sup>5</sup> Mr Cochrane (Ayrshire, N.) "The Invasion of Continental Gypsies" *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. 156. 2 May 1906. pp. 554-555. The more affluent Hungarian Gypsy Coppersmiths who travelled through Britain between 1911 and 1913 do not appear to have attracted the same amount of attention.

in their division. Although the police and public objected to the presence of any Gypsies in the localities, it would seem that they had a particular distaste for foreign nomads.<sup>6</sup> The constant movement of the Gypsies by the police prevented them from practising their trade of horse dealing. They soon ran out of money and were reported to be starving.<sup>7</sup> The Gypsies also had great difficulties obtaining water, owing to hostility in the localities, and were unable to wash, giving further ammunition to those who claimed all foreigners and all Gypsies were dirty. The Gypsies' state of destitution did little to recommend them to the British public. Their inability to earn a living led to accusations of idleness and parasitism and John Monk, Chief Inspector of the Metropolitan Police, wrote that '...it is doubtful whether any of them has any genuine claims to any trade or profession at all beyond the fact that he is a Gypsy'.<sup>8</sup>

In view of such circumstances, politicians and journalists alike claimed a long-standing sympathy for British Gypsies, who accepted restrictions on their freedom while the foreigners took advantage of lenient treatment in Britain. It was reported that:

...laws may coerce our own people, interfere with their "liberty", but only let the beggar be a foreigner, and for him is only licence - laws remain dumb.<sup>9</sup>

Popular stereotypes of foreigners supported negative images of the nomads and conspired to cast such foreign Gypsies as the very lowest form of immigrant. Officially the Home Office criticised the police for their handling of the German Gypsies. Yet politicians of all

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<sup>6</sup> The attitudes of Liberal politicians to the arrival of the Gypsies were recorded in "Liberal MPs Views" in *Daily Mail*, 15 Nov 1906. PRO: HO 45/10313/124855/84.

<sup>7</sup> John Monk, Metropolitan Police Report to Home Office. PRO: HO45/1031/124885/17.

<sup>8</sup> Letter from John Monk to the Secretary of State 22 Dec 1904. PRO: MEPO 2/745.

<sup>9</sup> "incursion of Gipsies", in *The Times*, 12 June 1908.

persuasions were equally repelled by the arrival of the nomads.<sup>10</sup> Previous attempts to introduce legislation restricting immigration into Britain had been resisted and many liberals both within and outside parliament held dear to the ideal of the British Isles as a safe-haven for those fleeing persecution abroad. However, Major W. Evans Gordon had long claimed there was an ‘...urgent necessity of introducing legislation to restrict the immigration of destitute aliens’.<sup>11</sup> In the eyes of proponents of such legislation, the Gypsies were ‘...a good advert for the Aliens Bill’ and their arrival ‘...a nice object lesson to a country with no control over aliens’.<sup>12</sup> Scaremongering by the press added to fears about immigrant Gypsies entering Britain. Reports emphasised the ‘very un-English appearance’ of the nomads and the likelihood that they were ‘not intimately acquainted with the cleansing properties of soap and water’.<sup>13</sup> In short, the campaigns surrounding the 1905 Aliens Act ran far deeper than the short-term reaction to immigrant Gypsies.<sup>14</sup> However, Monk believed that the agitation for such legislation to control alien immigration ‘... would have been lost but for the fact that five caravans of German gypsies ...landed at Batavia Wharf’ in that year.<sup>15</sup>

The 1905 Act was applicable only to steerage passengers as it was considered unlikely that the undesirables whom the legislation had been designed to exclude from entry would

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<sup>10</sup> See Holmes “The German Gypsy Question in Britain 1904-06” pp. 134-159. See also C. Holmes, *John Bulls Island: Immigration and British Society 1871-1971*. London: Macmillan, 1988. pp. 25.

<sup>11</sup> Major W. Evans-Gordon quoted in the *Royal Commission on Alien Immigration. Report with Minutes of Evidence and Appendix*. 1903 Cd. 1741 ix. 1. See also W. Evans-Gordon, *The Alien Immigrant*. London: Heinemann, 1903.

<sup>12</sup> Unpublished memoirs of Chief Inspector John Monk (1859-1946), Metropolitan Police Archive.

<sup>13</sup> “German Gypsies in Leicester. Nomads camp in the cattle market” in *Leicester Daily Post*, 2 Nov 1906.

<sup>14</sup> See B. Gainer, *The Alien Invasion. The Origins of the Alien Act of 1905*, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1972.

<sup>15</sup> Unpublished memoirs of Chief Inspector John Monk (1859-1946), Metropolitan Police Archive.

travel first or second class in any number. Immigration Officers were to reject those aliens regarded as diseased, insane, criminal or a putative public charge, but were advised always to give the benefit of the doubt when an alien claimed to be fleeing from persecution.<sup>16</sup> Although the Immigration Officers made the ultimate decisions on entry, the general conditions were laid down by the Secretary of State of the Home Department. Under the regulations drawn up for the administration of the Act in 1906, it was advised that in order to avoid being classified as a putative public charge, the aliens must be in possession of £5.00 for every adult and a further £2.00 for each dependant.<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps for a short period it was hoped that the Aliens Act would prevent further groups of immigrant Gypsies entering Britain. Certainly in April 1906 a group of twenty-six Gypsies were prevented from entering Britain after landing at West Hartlepool on board the steamer *Merick*.<sup>18</sup> Yet the passage of the 1905 Act did not mark the final chapter in Gypsy immigration to Britain. In fact, as long as ships carried fewer than twenty steerage passengers, they could completely avoid being classified as immigrant ships, and therefore subject to inspection. Such token measures did not even keep out further bands of the German Gypsies, who had so repelled politicians in 1904.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, further groups of German Gypsies continued to enter Britain in 1906. Like the earlier arrivals, those who came to Britain after the passage of the Aliens Act had no intention of staying and stated that they were merely

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<sup>16</sup> Gainer, *The Alien Invasion*. pp. 199-200.

<sup>17</sup> *Regulations made by the Secretary of State for the Home Department with regard to the Administration of the Alien Act, 1905*; 1906 Cd 2879 xcvi 729. See also Letter addressed by the Secretary of State for the Home Department to Members of the Immigration Boards, 9 March 1906. Cd 2879 xcvi 729.

<sup>18</sup> Crofton "Affairs of Egypt 1892-1906" p. 367.

<sup>19</sup> See C. Holmes, *John Bull's Island*, pp. 65.

passing through the country with an eye to business on their way to Italy.<sup>20</sup> Again the Gypsies were self-sufficient, earning their living by dealing with horses and giving exhibitions as acrobats.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the police hunted the Gypsies from county to county in the same way as the earlier group. In fact, while travelling through Perth, they were reported to have lost a horse owing to their inability to give the animal sufficient rest as the police pursued them from county to county.<sup>22</sup> The new arrivals provoked a great deal of controversy in parliament over the workings of the 1905 Act which had been inherited by a new Liberal Government.<sup>23</sup> However, even a number of Liberal MPs expressed concern over the entry of such nomads into Britain.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, the Secretary of State at the Home Office, Herbert Gladstone, agreed to consider without delay steps to restrict the arrival of such aliens.<sup>25</sup> Gladstone made an order under Section 8 (2) of the 1905 Aliens Act fixing at two the number of alien passengers which would lead to the classification of ships owned by James Currie and Co. of Leith, with whom the Gypsies had embarked on their voyage, as immigrant ships.<sup>26</sup> Although the shipping Company was able to negotiate the lifting of the measures by agreeing to inform its employees not to allow foreign Gypsies to board its ships, the case

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<sup>20</sup> Report by Procurator Fiscal of Perthshire. PRO: HO45/1031/124855/29.

<sup>21</sup> Report by Procurator Fiscal of Perthshire. PRO: HO45/1031/124855/29.

<sup>22</sup> Report by the Procurator Fiscal of Perthshire at Dunblane with reference to German Gypsies. NAS: HH55/317.

<sup>23</sup> "The Invasion of Continental Gypsies" *Parliamentary Debates*, 2 May 1906, Vol. 156, pp. 554-555.

<sup>24</sup> The attitudes of Liberal politicians to the arrival of the Gypsies were recorded in "Liberal MPs Views" in *Daily Mail*, 15 Nov 1906. PRO: HO 45/10313/124855/84.

<sup>25</sup> Gladstone cited in "The Invasion of Continental Gypsies" *Parliamentary Debates*, 2 May 1906, Vol. 156, pp. 554-555. See also correspondence between Chief Constables of Warwickshire, PRO: HO 45/10313/124855/84.

<sup>26</sup> Gladstone cited in "Continental Gypsies in Scotland" in *Parliamentary Debates*, 10 May 1906, Vol. 156, pp. 156-7. See also correspondence between James Currie and Co and Secretary of State, PRO: HO45/1031/124855/45, HO45/1031/124855/44, HO45/1031/124855/38.

served as a warning to other shipping companies on the consequences of bringing alien Gypsies to Britain.

On occasion, even where groups of Gypsies were able to satisfy the conditions of the Act, they could still find themselves barred from entry. In one heavily reported case in 1907, Hull Immigration Board refused to permit the entry of a band of 15 Serbian Gypsies who had arrived on board the Danish steamer *Georgio I*. These Gypsies were judged to be ‘undesirable aliens’ despite the fact that they were in possession of £160. The authorities argued that the Gypsies could not prove that the money was their *bona-fide* property and there was a suspicion it may have been given to them in order to secure a landing. The Chairman of the Board, Mr T. Hall Sissons, suggested during the proceedings that the concerns of the immigration authorities were related to the fact that the Distress Committee, which was sitting at that time, was struggling to find work for the British people.<sup>27</sup> In reality, there was little substance to the argument that tiny groups of immigrant Gypsies were in economic competition with the British working classes. However, such was the concern over the arrival of immigrant Gypsies in Britain that reactions to them were often far from rational. The fact that such weak arguments were adopted is a symptom of the deep-rooted hostility to the presence of foreigners and more specifically Gypsy foreigners on British soil. The interest in preventing the landing of Gypsies does not appear to have been unique to the Hull Immigration Board; a number of other immigration authorities made particular efforts to prevent the arrival of foreign Gypsies.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> See “Servian Gipsies Refused Landing at Hull” in *Yorkshire Post*, 15 Nov 1907. “The Gipsies Fate” in *Eastern Morning News*, 15 Nov 1907.

<sup>28</sup> “Incursion of Gipsies” in *The Times*, 6 June 1908.

However, the Act could not entirely prevent the arrival of small groups of Gypsies in Britain, and examples can be found at regular intervals until the passage of the Defence of the Realm Act in 1914. For example, a similar group of Serbian Gypsies to those who were refused entry in 1907 were able to secure a landing in London the following year.<sup>29</sup> Even during the war, a small number of Gypsies were believed to be included in the numbers of Belgian refugees entering the country and were reported to have settled in Hendon.<sup>30</sup> After the war, the nomads continued to enter the country in small numbers and the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* made regular reports of immigrant Gypsies sighted in Britain throughout the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>31</sup> It would seem that on occasion larger bands of Gypsies were also able to enter Britain separately in small unobtrusive parties and then regroup shortly after their arrival. Such was the case with a group of Greek Gypsies who arrived in Britain from Canada in 1929 and remained in the country until 1940. In this instance it is interesting that even once the Gypsies had regrouped and begun to travel throughout the country, they never faced the extreme hostility encountered by the early groups of German Gypsies. Although police surveillance was kept over the group throughout their stay in Britain they were not prevented from travelling and were not subject to the same degree of hostility from the press as the German Gypsies.<sup>32</sup> This contrast may, in part, be attributable to economic factors. Certainly the Greek Gypsies were considerably more affluent than the German visitors and made their living by restoring brass articles in Catholic churches, the repair of which was said to be ‘very

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<sup>29</sup> “Notes and Queries” in *JGLS*, NS, Vol. 12, 1933, p. 126.

<sup>30</sup> “Notes and Queries” in *JGLS*, NS, Vol. 12, 1933, p. 127.

<sup>31</sup> “Notes and Queries” in *JGLS*, NS, Vol. 12, 1933, p. 127.

<sup>32</sup> Report of Cardiff City Police Detective Department on “Tenis and Tom Stevenson- Travelling Gypsies”, 23 March 1934. GLS Correspondence Files: III-V, H-O.

satisfactory but expensive'.<sup>33</sup> Yet the German Gypsies also arrived in Britain with the means through which to make their livelihood and may well have succeeded in doing so had they not been prevented by the actions of the police. Thus the experiences of the Greek Gypsies in Britain offer further support to the view that the earlier treatment of the German Gypsies was related to wider concerns over immigration into Britain which existed in 1904 coupled with the prevailing suspicion of Germany and Germans.

Throughout the early twentieth century there remained a feeling, among politicians, that foreign Gypsies were less desirable than those who had resided in Britain for centuries. The particular distaste which members of the British parliament had developed for foreign nomads appears to have been further fuelled by the ideas of the 'friends' of the British Gypsies. The Gypsy Lore Society was inactive during the period in which the German Gypsies arrived in Britain and therefore offered no effective opposition to the treatment meted out to them.<sup>34</sup> However, the views expressed by one member of the Society on the subject of foreign Gypsies after it was revived in 1907 shed doubt on whether any opposition would have been forthcoming even had the Society been at work. In 1908 the ideas of J.H. Yoxall MP, a member of the Gypsy Lore Society, on the importance of drawing a distinction between British and foreign Gypsies were reported widely in the press. The issue was not the presence of foreign Gypsies on British soil but a rumour that a British delegate would be attending a conference, taking place in Berne, to consider possible solutions to Europe's

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<sup>33</sup> D. Yates, "The 'Greek' Nomad Gypsies in Britain 1929-1940" in *JGLS*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. XXI, 1942. pp. 87-110.

<sup>34</sup> The first phase of the Gypsy Lore Society began in 1888. However, the Society soon became paralysed by lack of funds and was dissolved in 1892. The Society was revived in 1907 when Robert Andrew Scott Macfie financed its re-birth, but was forced to disband once more in 1914 with the outbreak of the First World War, to be revived once more in 1927 by a financial contribution from William Ferguson.



Gypsy problem. The Gypsy Lore Society was concerned about the conference and demanded a reassurance from the British Government that a delegate would not be attending. However, Yoxall's arguments focused not on the evidence that an attempt was being made to suppress the Gypsy populations of Europe, but on the difference between the Gypsies elsewhere in Europe and those who resided in Britain:

...the gipsy bands which haunt parts of Europe are a great nuisance, but the English gipsies are not in the same category...I should not object, of course, to precautions being taken against bands of that kind coming into England, but I want to preserve for all the indigenous gipsies - there are very few of them left- the rights they have enjoyed in this country for hundreds of years.<sup>35</sup>

The argument that British Gypsies were different from those of Europe and did not require such repressive legislation, operated in exactly the same way as the arguments about degeneration within the British nomadic population. Members of the Gypsy Lore Society hoped to free the 'pure' Gypsies from the antipathetic stereotypes by blaming the crimes of which they were accused on the so-called half-breeds Gypsies. Likewise, Yoxall hoped to safeguard the rights of the British Gypsies at the expense of foreign nomads. However, the implications of such ideas for the treatment of foreign Gypsies in Britain were that severe measures in dealing with them could be justified on the grounds of the need to repress their criminality without offending romantic sentiments about the freedom of the nomadic life.

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<sup>35</sup> J.H Yoxall quoted in "English Gipsy Life. Mr Yoxall, MP, On Pending Legislation" in *The Daily News*, 26 Feb 1908.

## Vagrancy Legislation

The treatment of the German Gypsies in Britain is notable as an example of the sustained persecution and harassment of a minority group by the authorities. Yet it was not only foreign nomads who attracted distaste within governing circles during the early twentieth century. Notwithstanding voices which spoke up in favour of the indigenous nomadic population, the attention of legislators was also periodically drawn to this group. Indeed concerns over vagrancy had been evident among British politicians for centuries.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Section 4 of the 1824 Vagrancy Act (made applicable to Scotland by Section 15 of the 1871 Prevention of Crime Act) was still in force. The Act drew on terms employed in the 1739-40 Vagrancy Act which held it an offence to be an 'idle and disorderly person', a 'rogue or vagabond' or an 'incorrigible rogue'. Under this definition fell:

...every person pretending or professing to tell fortunes, or using any subtle craft, means, or device, by palmistry or otherwise to deceive...every person wandering abroad and lodging in any barn or outhouse, or any deserted or unoccupied building, or in the open air, or under a tent, or in any cart or waggon, not having any visible means of subsistence and not giving a good account of himself or herself...every person wandering abroad and endeavouring to gather alms...<sup>36</sup>

Even at the time of its enactment, the 1824 Act had met with criticism for its severity.<sup>37</sup> It was aimed at the assimilation of the nomadic people and the harsh penalties for vagrancy often

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<sup>36</sup> Vagrancy Act 1824; 5 Geo. IV., ch. 83.

<sup>37</sup> See D. Mayall, *English Gypsies and State Policies*, Hertfordshire: University of Hertfordshire Press, 1995. p. 29.

included several months in prison with hard labour.<sup>38</sup> Although Section 4 of the Act was applicable to Scotland it does not appear to have been widely used in this country. Indeed, when in 1910 a Scottish Justice wrote to the *Justice of the Peace* to enquire as to whether the Act was applicable to Scotland the answer given was in the negative.<sup>39</sup> However, the 1917-18 Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland considered that although vagrancy itself was not a common law offence in Scotland those found wandering could be proceeded against under Section 4 of the Vagrancy Act through Section 15 of the 1871 Prevention of Crime Act.<sup>40</sup> By contrast there are numerous examples of the Act being put into force against nomadic people in England and Wales during the early twentieth century and many prosecutions of Gypsies under the Vagrancy Act for sleeping out or sleeping under tents were reported in the press. In one instance in 1907, a police raid on a Gypsy camp at Sutton Wick at one o'clock in the morning led to numerous convictions for the offence of sleeping out.<sup>41</sup> In a similar instance in North Marden in Sussex in the same year, a number of Gypsies were prosecuted and given a fine for the offence of sleeping under a tent.<sup>42</sup> Those found guilty were warned that prison sentences would follow were they to repeat the offence. Although the Act was widely used, there were clearly problems with the working of the legislation at the beginning of the twentieth century. In particular, the police and justices complained

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<sup>38</sup> See "Law Report. County of London Sessions" in *The Times*, 4 Oct 1904. PRO: HO144/541/A51669/86. "Palmistry" in *Truth*, 12 June 1890. PRO: HO144/541/A51669/3.

<sup>39</sup> "Vagrancy Act" in *Justice of the Peace*, 16 July, 1910. Vol. LXXIV, No 29, p. 346.

<sup>40</sup> *Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland Evidence* of Donald Macay, (1918), Appendix VII. NAS: HH61/77.

<sup>41</sup> "Raid on Gipsy Camp: Sleeping in the Open Air" in *Oxford Chronicle*, 20 Dec 1907.

<sup>42</sup> "Warning to Gipsies" in *Sussex Daily News*, 8 May 1907.

throughout the early decades of the difficulties involved in interpreting such ambiguous terms as ‘not giving good account of himself’ and ‘without visible means of subsistence’.<sup>43</sup>

There was an increasing feeling of alarm among politicians over the wandering people of Great Britain at the beginning of the twentieth century. The concern was not directed towards Gypsies specifically but stemmed from a wider fear of a swell in the number of beggars, tramps and paupers who were believed to constitute a significant proportion of the nomadic population. It was feared that the vagrant classes were not only growing in size but that their criminal tendencies were also increasing.<sup>44</sup> Even the crime of fortune telling continued to be perceived as a threat to social order. In a letter to the Home Office in 1900 the Assistant Commissioner of Police at New Scotland Yard urged that it was not only the lower classes that were vulnerable to the practices of palmists. He claimed that even ‘...among people of mature years and opulent circumstances serious mischief is being done’.<sup>45</sup> However, although there was concern over the dangers of fortune telling, it was believed by the Secretary of State that there was a good deal of public sentiment against punishing people for the crimes of sleeping out and begging.<sup>46</sup> Thus when in 1904 the Salvation Army presented the Home Office with a new draft Vagrancy Bill, which aimed to increase the detention of those found guilty of such offences and have them committed to labour colonies, the Home

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<sup>43</sup> See Metropolitan Police Memo on Vagrancy, 1904. PRO: MEPO 2/682. Also see for example “Vagrancy Act - Visible Means” in *Police Review*, Vol. XII, 9 Dec 1904. pp. 590. “Vagrancy - Sleeping out” in *Police Review*, Vol. XIII, March 17, 1905. pp. 122. “Vagrancy” in *Police Review*, Vol. XIV, 17 Aug, 1906. pp. 386. “Vagrants Begging Alms” in *Police Review*, Vol. XXXV, Aug 19, 1927. pp. 611.

<sup>44</sup> See *Report of the Departmental Committee on Vagrancy*, Vol. I; (1906) Cd 2852 ciii. 1.

<sup>45</sup> Letter from Assistant Commissioner of Police, New Scotland Yard to the Secretary of State, 9 April 1900. PRO: HO144/541/A51669/33.

<sup>46</sup> Secretary of State Memo. on Vagrancy and the 1904 Vagrancy Bill, 4 Nov 1903. PRO: HO 45/10499/117669/1.

Office opposed the measures. Yet there remained a significant degree of concern over vagrancy and a Departmental Committee was established by the Liberal Government to enquire into the nature and extent of the problem. In 1906 the Committee reported that the number of paupers roaming the streets and countryside in 1904 had passed all previous records.<sup>47</sup>

The report of the 1906 Vagrancy Committee is illustrative of a trend, which prevailed throughout the early twentieth century, whenever Gypsies were considered by legislators. The Committee drew distinctions between members of the nomadic population as a means of excusing a repressive policy. The Committee considered it vital to ascertain the precise constitution of the travelling population and many questions were asked of witnesses to that end, many of whom expressed a belief in the idea that the 'true' Gypsies of the 'old-blood' were a different, and more respectable people than the majority of travellers to be found on the roads. However, the idea that such people were rare and rapidly vanishing can also be detected throughout their responses. Witnesses defined 'Gypsy' as '...the real race with the eastern strain in them' and time and again the Committee heard that there were '...very few of the really pure gipsy class' left in Britain.<sup>48</sup> One witness even went as far as to suggest that the 'true' Gypsies could not be affected by legislation aimed at assimilation owing to the fact that they wandered by 'nature' rather than by 'habit' as was the case with the wider vagrant population.<sup>49</sup> Such ideas led the Committee to adopt the view that there existed within the

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<sup>47</sup> See *Report of the Departmental Committee on Vagrancy*, Vol. I; (1906) Cd 2852 ciii. 1.

<sup>48</sup> *Report of Departmental Committee on Vagrancy., Minutes of Evidence*, of Captain James Fullarton,, Chief Constable of Northumberland, (1906). para. 7560.

<sup>49</sup> *Report of Departmental Committee on Vagrancy., Minutes of Evidence*, of Mr J.G Legge, Inspector of Reformatory and Industrial Schools, (1906). para. 4495-4497.

large class of vagrants a tiny minority of Gypsies who were often of ‘...a respectable character’, and differed from the ‘vagrants’ for whom harsher legislation was required. However, the report of the Committee argued that, since such people constituted only a tiny minority, harsh and assimilationist legislation was justified. It was claimed that the Gypsies who wandered by instinct would not be affected by measures which were aimed at the more troublesome vagrants.<sup>50</sup> The idea of a hierarchy within the nomadic population was a useful tool in the arguments of those who wished to secure harsh legislation against vagrancy. It enabled reformers and politicians to call for more severe legislation without offending liberal notions of freedom. The proposals could hardly be disputed when it was argued that measures were necessary to suppress the criminal element and were by no means aimed at the more respectable Gypsy class.

The Government took no direct action on the report of the 1906 Committee. There continued to be concern, however, over the itinerant minorities of Britain and calls from a number of groups for harsher penalties for those found wandering. Sir William Chance, who had sat on the 1904-06 Departmental Committee on Vagrancy, called for a system of labour colonies to be established to put vagrants to work. Chance urged that harsh measures should not be aimed at restricting the liberty of individuals; the colonies should be viewed as analogous to reformatory or industrial schools, where offenders would be taught to take their place as industrious citizens.<sup>51</sup> Such ideas appear to have attracted support in Britain throughout the early twentieth century. Both the 1918 Departmental Committee on Tinkers in

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<sup>50</sup> See *Report of the Departmental Committee on Vagrancy*, Vol. I; (1906) Cd 2852 ciii. 1. And “Gipsies” (Memorandum prepared by the Home Office) Appendix xxxiv.

Scotland and the 1936 the Committee on Vagrancy in Scotland, called for the establishment of labour colonies for those nomads who refused to take sedentary employment.<sup>52</sup>

At the same time, there continued to be concern over the way in which the 1824 Vagrancy Act was being used in the localities. In 1907 John Ostler, a visiting justice at Hull prison, wrote to the Home Secretary voicing concerns over the unfairness of giving out prison sentences for offences such as begging and sleeping out.<sup>53</sup> In further correspondence during the following year, Ostler brought a number of cases to the attention of the Home Office in which those found guilty of begging and sleeping out had been sentenced for as long as thirty days in prison.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore he pointed out that in the preceding nine months' period 1,800 persons had been sentenced to prison under the Vagrancy Act in Lincolnshire alone.<sup>55</sup> The Secretary of State agreed that: 'Probably half of these men ought not to have been sent to prison at all'.<sup>56</sup> In 1912 concerns were raised in parliament over the working of the Act and, in particular, the fact that a small number of those convicted of trivial offences under it were whipped.<sup>57</sup> Even so, complaints as to the nuisance and danger caused by nomadic classes to the respectable poor also continued. In 1912 the Inspector of the Local Government Board for Lincolnshire reported that the isolated position of many cottages in

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<sup>51</sup> W. Chance, *Vagrancy. Being a Review of the Report of the Departmental Committee on Vagrancy (1906), with Answers to Certain Criticisms*, London: P. S King and Son, 1906. pp. 20.

<sup>52</sup> *Report of the Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland*, (1918), para. 89. *Report of the Committee on Vagrancy in Scotland*, (1936), para. 94.

<sup>53</sup> Letter from John Ostler to Secretary of State, 22 Jan 1907. PRO: HO 45/10520/138276/14.

<sup>54</sup> Letter from John Ostler to Secretary of State, 29 Feb 1908. PRO: HO 45/10520/138276/29.

<sup>55</sup> Letter from John Ostler to Secretary of State, 11 March 1908. PRO: HO 45/10520/138276/30.

<sup>56</sup> Secretary of State Memo., 11 March 1908. PRO: HO 45/10520/138276/30.

<sup>57</sup> Question for Secretary of State from George Greenwood, 4 Dec 1912. PRO: HO 45/10520/138276/19.

the county made residents of Lincolnshire vulnerable to the scores of nomads entering the county to work on the potato and pea-picking harvest.<sup>58</sup> Some sources even suggested that the laws in Britain worked to the advantage of the vagrants. Hence, a book written about the vagrancy problem in 1910 claimed that:

Other countries have their tramps and loafers, but they regard and treat them as a public nuisance, and as such deny them legal recognition; only here are they deliberately tolerated and to some extent fostered.<sup>59</sup>

It was argued that the system of giving short sentences for crimes under the Vagrancy Act led members of the nomadic population to commit offences on purpose in order to get a lift to the next town from the police, or to receive a meal in jail. The solution to this abuse was believed to lie in giving harsher sentences to those convicted.<sup>60</sup> The Association of County Councils in Scotland, for its part, called for the introduction of labour colonies for all those who persisted in their wandering.<sup>61</sup>

Faced with such public debate, the Home Office resisted pleas to introduce further legislation dealing with the question of vagrancy and the urgency of the matter evaporated with the onset of the First World War. In early 1916 the Recruiting Authorities held discussions with the Ministry of Health who agreed to send out a circular to Local Authorities informing them to report nomads of serving age to the nearest recruitment office

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<sup>58</sup> Report on Vagrancy in Lincolnshire by the Inspector of the Local Government Board, 1912. PRO: MH 57/181.

<sup>59</sup> W. H. Dawson, *The Vagrancy Problem. The Case for Measure of Restraint for Tramps, Loafers and Unemployables*, London: P. S. King and Co, 1910. p. viii.

<sup>60</sup> "Vagrancy in Scotland" in *Justice of the Peace*, 19 Sept, 1936. Vol. C, No 37, pp. 618-9.

<sup>61</sup> Letter from the Association of County Councils of Scotland to the Scottish Secretary, 7 May 1913. NAS: HH55/236.



as soon as possible.<sup>62</sup> With many nomadic men drafted into the forces casual wards closed, the drastically reduced police force found priorities elsewhere and the vagrancy question disappeared from the agenda.<sup>63</sup> In fact it was considered that with the outbreak of war there had been a dramatic reduction in the types of petty crime which were believed to be committed by nomadic people. In 1916 an article in the *Justice of the Peace* claimed that a key factor in this reduction of crime had been the recruitment of criminal classes such as vagrants to the military.<sup>64</sup> Elsewhere, it was suggested that the recruitment of vagrant men into the military had encouraged their families left behind in Britain to leave the roads and settle in houses. For example, Robert Parr of the NSPCC, hailed the settlement of the nomads as the one positive effect of the war:

The war has changed the habits and customs of a good many people. Possibly no class in the community has found so great a change as the tramp child. There are signs that a manifest evil has been severely checked, if not entirely stopped.<sup>65</sup>

However, the Vagrancy Act remained in force and although the number of prosecutions under the Act never again reached its pre-war level, there was a marginal increase, with the return of the nomadic people after the war. In 1925 the police were reminded that in order to charge an individual with begging under the 1824 Act it was not necessary that persons

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<sup>62</sup> See Vagrancy Report PRO: MH57/78.

<sup>63</sup> "Casual Wards and their Visitation by Justices" in *The Justice of the Peace*, Vol. LXXXV, 5 Feb 1921. pp. 66.

<sup>64</sup> "The Effect of the War on Crime" in *Justice of the Peace*, 18 March, 1916. Vol. LXXX, No 2, pp. 133-4.

<sup>65</sup> R. Parr, "The Child of the Tramp. One Good Effect of the War" in *The Evening News*, 17 Feb 1916.

charged should have actually been caught begging as long as their evident object had been the gathering of alms.<sup>66</sup>

Years	Average Prosecutions Per Year under the 1824 Vagrancy Act
1900-1904	9,654
1905-1909	12,277
1910-1914	8,594
1915-1919	1,615
1920-1924	2,607
1925-1929	2,163
1930	1,995
1931	1,612

(4. Table showing the average annual prosecutions made in Britain under the 1824 Vagrancy Act between 1900 and 1931. Source: Home Office Statistical Branch data. PRO Ref: HO 45/15852/663451/22)

Despite what the Home Office considered to be a clear public sentiment against the prosecution of persons whose only fault was destitution, it was not until the 1930s that the legislation of 1824 underwent any fundamental change.<sup>67</sup> The move came between 1933 and 1935 when the Labour/National Government was in power. In 1933 Brigadier General Spears MP brought to the attention of the Home Office, the death in custody of a vagrant ex-serviceman named John Thomas Parker.<sup>68</sup> Parker, aged 35 had been arrested and sentenced to fourteen days hard labour for the crime of wandering. In Birmingham prison Parker was punished for insolence and refusing to obey an order. He was found dead in a punishment

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<sup>66</sup> Metropolitan Police, *Instruction Book for the Guidance of the Metropolitan Police*, London: Metropolitan Police, 1925. pp. 88.

<sup>67</sup> HO Memo, 8 Jan 1904. PRO: HO45/10499/117669.

cell within twenty minutes of having been admitted and the inquiry into his death revealed he had been killed by a blow to the head.<sup>69</sup> Although accidental death was recorded, the case received broad publicity.<sup>70</sup> The newspapers speculated that the cause of Parker's behaviour in prison had been claustrophobia and complained that the penalty of imprisonment for vagrancy was wholly inappropriate, particularly as many vagrants possessed an innate tendency towards wandering and were unable to cope with life indoors.<sup>71</sup> Parker was not the first nomad to die in custody under questionable circumstances. In an earlier incident an elderly Scottish itinerant named Thomas Farr had died of exposure after being held outside on a cart in bad weather for two hours because the governor of the local poor house refused to admit him without the consent of the Inspector of Poor.<sup>72</sup> However, such was the extent of the publicity surrounding the Parker case that the Home Office issued a circular to Police Constables in order to determine the extent to which the Act was being used. The response revealed huge discrepancies in the working of the Vagrancy Act across the police divisions. It was found that out of 1,540 prosecutions under the Act in 1932, over half had been made within 6 police districts.

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<sup>68</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 22 Jan, 1934. Vol. 286, col. 490.

<sup>69</sup> Inquiry into the Death of Thomas Parker and Change of Vagrancy Laws. PRO: HO 45/15852/663451/1.

<sup>70</sup> "A Prisoners Death at Winson Green. Sequel to a Struggle with Two Wardens" in *Birmingham Daily Post*, 14 June 1933. "Prison Escort Vindicated. Death Injuries of a Man in a Cell" in *Daily Express*, 15 June 1933. "Insane Psychology" in *Truth*, 2 Aug 1933. "Claustrophobia" in *The Times*, 30 Aug 1933.

<sup>71</sup> The Vagrancy Act and the Case of Thomas Parker" in *The Howard Journal*, Vol. III, No 4, 1933.

<sup>72</sup> See I. Levitt, *Government and Social Conditions in Scotland 1845-1919*, Edinburgh: Blackwood, Pillans and Wilson, 1988. pp. 247.

District	Number of Arrests under the 1824 Vagrancy Act in 1932
Metropolitan Police District	262
Hampshire	198
Liverpool	130
Birmingham	115
Bristol	55
Swansea	51
	<b>Total 811</b>

(5. Table showing the numbers of arrests under the 1824 Vagrancy Act in 1932 in the six districts in which the Act was most frequently used. Source: Home Office Statistical Branch data. PRO Ref: HO 45/15852/663451/22)

The Home Office inquired of the police as to what action should be taken in regard to reform of the Vagrancy Act. They were asked whether the Act should be repealed altogether or amended to apply only to those vagrants who were a danger to the wider community. The overwhelming response from the police was that the Vagrancy Act should be strengthened in order to increase the powers of the police to deal with vagrants.<sup>73</sup> However, there was considerable pressure both within and outside parliament for an amendment to the Act, which would reduce the likelihood of its being used against innocent parties merely on the grounds that they were destitute. There were also calls for the repeal of the clause, which required those accused of vagrancy to offer visible means of subsistence and to be able to give good account of themselves.<sup>74</sup> It was felt that there was a need to protect innocent campers and hawkers from the provisions of the legislation and it was also suggested that ‘...the gipsy

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<sup>73</sup> Police memo., 17 Aug, 1935. PRO: MEPO 2/4637.

<sup>74</sup> “The Vagrancy Act” in *Justice of the Peace*, Vol. 95, 9 Dec 1931. pp. 540.

may be less respectable but is equally in need of protection'.<sup>75</sup> An amendment bill was drawn up which placed stricter conditions on the arrest of vagrants under the 1824 Vagrancy Act. Under the new Bill, those found wandering and lodging in barns, outhouses, unoccupied buildings or in the open air and not giving proper account of themselves could still be arrested as rogues or vagabonds. However, before arrest could take place it had to be proven that they had been directed to a place of shelter and had failed to apply for accommodation. Furthermore, it was necessary to prove that either the individuals persistently were engaged in persistent wandering or that they were likely to cause damage to property or to infect it with vermin.<sup>76</sup> In April 1935 the Vagrancy (amendment) Bill, having passed two readings in the Commons, went to a Committee of the whole House. The 1935 Vagrancy Act came into force later the same year. Under the new legislation the likelihood of a Gypsy being arrested as a vagrant was significantly reduced. No longer was sleeping under a tent a criminal offence. However, those found sleeping in the open air were still required to give good account of themselves.<sup>77</sup> The passing of the 1935 Act did not mark a change in attitudes to the nomadic classes across society and there continued to be those who called for harsher measures to deal with vagrants.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, there certainly remained a great deal of suspicion of nomadic groups at the local level, particularly among the police. Hence, in 1938 the

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<sup>75</sup> Note on second reading of the Vagrancy Bill. PRO: MEPO 2/4637/44a. The interest in 'protecting the rights of innocent campers' is almost certainly a reference to the increasing popularity of camping and caravanning among the British public during the early twentieth century. During this period numerous organisations were founded by groups with an interest in rural life. This trend can be viewed in the first decade of the twentieth century when the Scouts was founded in 1908 and the Girl Guides in 1910. Other national organisations were formed to defend the interests of those who enjoyed country living. For example, the Camping and Caravanning Club was established in 1901, the Youth Hostel Association was established in 1930 and the National Council of Ramblers Federations was established in 1931 as a body to represent the interests of the rambling groups in Britain which had been increasing in number since the 1820s.

<sup>76</sup> Police Orders 28 June 1935. PRO: MEPO 2/4637/56a.

<sup>77</sup> "Wandering Abroad" The Vagrancy Act, 1935" in *Police Review*, Vol. .XLIV, 2 Aug 1935. p. 103.

Metropolitan Police called for the compulsory finger printing of all applicants for peddler's licences, in order to prevent them being given to those with criminal records.<sup>79</sup> However, the Conservative Government, now in power, resisted this pressure.

The criticism which the State had encountered over the use of the Vagrancy Act during the early twentieth century played a significant part in shaping future policy. It was clear that while the police and local authorities in many areas campaigned for harsher measures for dealing with the nomad class, in reality both the press and a significant sector of the public opposed openly assimilationist measures. Thus throughout the early twentieth century, the State avoided being associated with attempts to assimilate the nomadic classes. However, at the same time, attempts were made to placate the cries of those who called for the abolition of nomadism through piecemeal clauses incorporated in broader legislation.

### **The 1908 Children's Act**

The most important piece of legislation to affect British Gypsies during the first decade of the early twentieth century was the Children's Act of 1908. It was not directed at Gypsies specifically but Clause 118 was to become a battleground fought over by those who opposed and supported the Gypsies both in and outside parliament. When the Children's Bill was first introduced, Clause 118 attracted little attention and passed through its first two

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<sup>78</sup> For example, in an address to the Oxford Eugenics Society on "Heredity and Environment as Causes as Vagrants" Frank Gray suggested that long-term detention was the only solution to the problem of vagrancy. See "Drastic Measures for Vagrants" in *The Justice of the Peace*, Vol. XCV, No 49. 5 Dec, 1931. p. 755.

<sup>79</sup> Minutes on finger printing applicants for peddler's licences, 1938. MEPO2/5528/30.

readings in the Commons unaltered. In the original draft of the Bill the Clause held that an offence had been committed:

If a person habitually wanders from place to place and takes with him any child above the age of five...unless he can prove that the child is totally exempt from school attendance or that the child is not by being so taken with him prevented from receiving elementary education.<sup>80</sup>

The principal of free and compulsory elementary education had been introduced in Britain in the 1870 Education Act and had begun to be systematically enforced by 1890. Since that time, calls for further legislation, to compel groups such as Gypsies and canal boat people to send their children to school had been heard from various quarters.<sup>81</sup> Clause 118 of the 1908 Children's Act was designed to address these concerns.

The penalties for the offence of preventing a child receiving an education through wandering were to be harsh. The guardian of the child could be apprehended without a warrant, fined up to twenty shillings if found guilty and the child was to be sent to an industrial school. However, the provision was not entirely new, for under Section 14 of the 1866 Industrial School Act the children of professional or habitual vagrants could already be dealt with in this way. Similarly Section 1 of the 1899 Poor Law Act endowed the Guardians with the power to exercise the rights and powers of parents over a child, whenever it was judged that the parents' mode of life made them unfit to exercise control. In fact, in a circular sent out to justices in 1907, Herbert Gladstone had recommended these clauses as the most appropriate means to deal with the children of wanderers, arguing that:

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<sup>80</sup> Children's Bill [passed cap 67] to consolidate and amend the law relating to the Protection of Children and Young Persons, Reformatory and Industrial Schools and Juvenile Offenders; 1908 (69) i 403.

...a committal to an Industrial School should in such cases be regarded not as a punishment, but as a means of securing a proper education for a child who would otherwise be deprived of it owing to his parents' disorderly mode of life.<sup>82</sup>

Despite the existence of such legislation there had continued to be calls for new powers to detain the children of wanderers and secure their education. For example, in February 1908 the Scottish Chief Constables' Club argued for legislation which would enable the children of all wanderers to be committed to industrial schools.<sup>83</sup>

The sentiment behind Clause 118 of the Children's Bill was paternalistic rather than repressive. However, the Bill also represented an interest in ensuring the assimilation of nomadic people and was based on the long-standing argument that the surest means to put a stop to the nomadic life was to work with the children of wanderers.<sup>84</sup> The philosophy behind it was that if children could be prevented from following in what were perceived as the misguided ways of their parents, then within one or perhaps two generations, it was believed that the problem of the wandering peoples would be resolved without resorting to more openly repressive legislation.<sup>85</sup> The Clause had a number of influential supporters such as Robert Parr, Director of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. Parr

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<sup>81</sup> See for example, Free Church of Scotland Education Committee. Report and Deputation Tinker Children to Lord Balfour, Secretary for Scotland, 30 Jan 1897. NAS: HH55/236.

<sup>82</sup> Circular to Justices, March 1907. PRO: HO 45/10520/138276/2.

<sup>83</sup> Memo. to Parliament from School Boards and other Public Bodies regarding Vagrant Tinker children in Scotland. NAS: HH55/236.

<sup>84</sup> Such arguments can be seen in the work of J. Baird, *The Scottish Gipsies' Advocate*, Edinburgh: John Lindsay, 1839. pp. 25-28. see also First Report of the Committee for the Reformation of Gipsies in Scotland, Edinburgh: Thomas Constable, 1840. p. 8.

<sup>85</sup> Such arguments can be found in the work of Heinrich Grellmann and were employed as state policy by Maria Theresa and Joseph II, see E. Trigg, *Gypsy Demons and Divinities. The Magic and Religion of the Gypsies*, Secaucus, N.J: Citadel Press, 1973. pp. 14-16.



argued specifically that the children of Gypsies, Tinkers and hawkers should be included under this Section of the Bill.<sup>86</sup> He complained in a letter to Herbert Samuel at the Home Office that, although the local authorities already had the power to remove a child from

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<sup>86</sup> Memorandum on the proposed Children's Bill by the Scottish NSPCC 1907. PRO: HO45/10361/154821/12.

nomadic parents and place it in an industrial school, the possibility was rarely exercised owing to the interest in avoiding an increase in local rates. Parr hoped that the new legislation could be used to encourage local authorities to remove the children from the roads.<sup>87</sup> The Bill also quickly gained the support of those who hoped for the abolition of the Gypsy life-style, including the influential Surrey landowners Lord Clifford, Lord Farrer, Lord Onslow and Reginald Justice Bray.

Clause 118 came to the attention of members of the Gypsy Lore Society and provoked a hysterical reaction amid fears that the children of the Romanies were to be rounded up and swept into industrial schools. However, by the time the Society embarked on its campaign against the Bill, it had already passed through Standing Committee without any alteration to the clause.<sup>88</sup> The Society engaged in a letter writing campaign to members of the House of Lords, the House of Commons and also to both the local and national press. Its campaign focused on blaming other sections of the nomadic population for the crimes of which 'pure' Gypsies were accused. Time and time again the scholars' arguments related to the idea that the Gypsies were undergoing a process of degeneration. The Society emphasised the negative qualities of the 'half-breed' Gypsies or tramps and suggested that a clear distinction should be drawn between these people and the 'true' Romanies. It argued that since the Romanies lived so close to nature, education was inappropriate and would only spoil what was otherwise a romantic existence.<sup>89</sup> In defence of this argument Robert Scott Macfie, the Society's secretary, drew upon the image of the Gypsy as an uncivilised race. He

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<sup>87</sup> Robert Parr letter from Robert Parr, Director of the N.S.P.C.C to Herbert Samuel, 30 Sept 1907. PRO: HO45/10361/15482/6.

<sup>88</sup> Children's Bill, as amended by Standing Committee B; 1908 (291) I. 485.

claimed that the primitive nature of the Gypsy parents' relationship with their children would make separating Gypsy children who failed to attend school from their parents a dangerous process:

being familiar with Gypsy character and the intensely affectionate relationship which subsists between Gypsy parents and their children, I am of the opinion that this clause could only be enforced at the expense of bloodshed.<sup>90</sup>

However, Macfie accepted many of the arguments of the legislators and believed that in the case of Gypsies lower down in the nomadic hierarchy, some kind of legislation was justifiable. He succeeded in gaining the attention of Earl Russell, who agreed to oppose the clause in the House of Lords. There remained strong support for the Bill, however, and Macfie feared that Russell was '...a 'crank' and might not have much influence'.<sup>91</sup> But Macfie furnished Russell with arguments with which to oppose the clause, which emphasised in particular the racial divisions within the travelling population.

It was clear to both the Home Office and the Board of Education, both of which supported the Bill, that it would be impossible to draw distinctions between nomads for legislative purposes.<sup>92</sup> Distinctions between 'half-Gypsies' and those of 'pure blood' could never be applied in practice when even academics could not agree on the way in which such people could be classified. Macfie soon became aware that the Home Office would not be

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<sup>89</sup> Letter from R. A. S Macfie to Earl Beachamp, 15 Nov 1908. [SMGC A26-A30].

<sup>90</sup> Letter from R. A. S Macfie to Earl Russell, 5 Nov 1908. [SMGC A26-A30].

<sup>91</sup> Letter from R. A. S Macfie to Lady Arthur Grosvenor, 14 July 1908. [SMGC A26-A30].

<sup>92</sup> The problems of drawing vagrants into distinct groups for legislative purposes were laid down in a Home Office memo. on the Children's Bill, Dec 1907. PRO: HO45/10361/154821/17.

prepared to accept any exemption clause for 'true' Romanies and instead of calling for distinctions to be made between travellers, his position then shifted to the view that it was wise to avoid educating all travelling groups since, in the case of 'half-breeds' and tramps, education '...might make them worse thieves and beggars than they are already'.<sup>93</sup>

The representations made to parliament by those groups who opposed the clause no doubt served to reinforce in the minds of politicians the importance of distinguishing between different sectors of the nomadic population. The Showman's Guild, which embarked on a separate campaign against the clause, also based its arguments on the importance of racial and economic distinctions between travellers. The Guild claimed that the Showmen were a far more respectable class than Gypsies and keen to ensure that their children received an education whenever they remained long enough in one place. Like the Gypsy Lore Society, the Showman's Guild attempted to give weight to its arguments by agreeing that in the case of other sections of the nomadic population some degree of legislation would be useful.<sup>94</sup> The consistent use of racial arguments by opponents of the Clause soon seeped into the debates within parliament. When the House of Lords debated the Bill in November 1908, Earl Russell who had come to represent the views of the Gypsy Lore Society, took a distinctly racial line, arguing that the Gypsies differed from other vagrants. His argument revolved around the idea that the measures would be particularly harsh on the 'pure-blooded gypsy' who was unlikely to have any settled relatives with whom to leave children while they attended school.<sup>95</sup> This

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<sup>93</sup> Letter from R. A. S Macfie to Lord Farrer, 20 Aug 1908. [SMGC A26-A30].

<sup>94</sup> T. Murphy, *History of the Showman's Guild*, Oldham: Privately Printed by The World's Fair, 1949. p. 63.

<sup>95</sup> Earl Russell cited in *The Parliamentary Debates*, Series 4, Vol. 196, 12 Nov 1908. p. 493.

line of argument had an interesting effect on members of the House. Even those who most vehemently supported the Bill felt compelled to profess ‘...a certain sympathy with the genuine gypsies who carry into this unromantic age some flavour of a more attractive life than that which is led by many people in this country’.<sup>96</sup> However, in some cases responses were more complex. Despite Lord Farrer’s claim to have sympathy for the ‘genuine’ Gypsy, during the same period he was involved in talks with a number of other Surrey landowners who resolved to form an association for the purpose of preventing the encampment of Gypsies within the districts inhabited by members.<sup>97</sup> It would seem that the arguments of Scott Macfie and other members of the Gypsy Lore Society had provided the perfect means through which to excuse the harsher aspects of the legislation. The justification of clause 118 in its original form was, in the words of Lord Farrer, that: ‘They were not the gypsies of the old kind...’ as ‘...there were extremely few of the old gypsies left’.<sup>98</sup>

Eventually, the campaign of the Gypsy Lore Society met with some success. Earl Russell moved the omission of the Clause 118 from the Bill and Lord Crewe promised that consideration should be given to the question of whether any means could be found of meeting the objections raised by the somewhat drastic proposal in the Clause.<sup>99</sup> Dora Yates, assistant to Scott Macfie, wrote to her cousin Herbert Samuel in the Home Office who promised his help to persuade advocates of the Bill to agree to the inclusion of an amendment

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<sup>96</sup> The Earl of Crewe cited in *The Parliamentary Debates*, Series 4, Vol. 196, 12 Nov 1908. p. 494.

<sup>97</sup> “Gipsies in Surrey” in *The Times*, 20 Feb, 1909. see also Farrer, “Gipsies and Surrey Commons” Letter to *The Times*, 17 May 1910.

<sup>98</sup> Lord Farrer cited in *The Parliamentary Debates*, Series 4, Vol. 196, 12 Nov 1908. p. 494.

<sup>99</sup> Memorandum on Section 118 of the Children’s Act (1908), 3 Feb 1922. PRO: HO45/11052/173732/54.

to Clause 118 as it passed through the House of Lords.<sup>100</sup> The amendment exempted the children during the times of the year when most travellers took to the road for reasons of trade, on the condition that they made two hundred school attendances during the rest of the year.<sup>101</sup> At the third reading in the House of Lords, Lord Beauchamp moved the insertion of the new clause. Herbert Samuel at the Home Office pointed out that many Gypsies went into houses during the winter and were willing to educate their children while they settled at this time of year. The exemption clause was accepted. However, even with it, the Act required Gypsies to apply to the Local Education Authority of the area in which the child attended school for an attendance card from the Board of Education. This card could be used to confirm school attendance only in the area of that Local Education Authority and if the child was educated in more than one area then separate applications and separate cards were required. The Act therefore would have immediately frustrated the lives of Gypsies who travelled over long distances since they would have been required to make applications for numerous attendance cards for their children's education. Furthermore, even after an attendance card had been satisfactorily completed, the Board of Education was clear, in a circular sent to Local Education Authorities, that certificates of exemption should not be issued unless parents could prove that their trade or profession required them to travel during the summer months.<sup>102</sup> The circular was not specific as to what evidence an individual was required to produce in order to prove that their profession required them to travel during the summer. It is likely that a peddler's licence would have been regarded as adequate proof,

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<sup>100</sup> Letter Herbert Samuel to Dora Yates, 1 Dec 1908. [SMGC A26-A30].

<sup>101</sup> Attendance at school in the morning and afternoon constituted two separate attendances.

<sup>102</sup> Board of Education circular to Local Education Authorities PRO: HO45/11052/173732/15.

although how those who engaged in seasonal agricultural work were to gain exemption is unclear.

In the course of correspondence the Home Office assured the Gypsy Lore Society that the Act would be introduced gradually and time would be allowed for Gypsies to hear of the new legislation. It was ruled that although the Children's Act became operative in April 1909, no prosecutions could be taken under Section 118 before March 1910, in order to give the nomadic population time to become acquainted with the new provisions.<sup>103</sup> However a report of the Surrey Education Sub-Committee on the School Attendance of Gypsy Children, presented to the Home Office in July 1910, reported that the nomadic population was entirely in ignorance of the provisions; no attempts had been made to inform them of the Act.<sup>104</sup> Captain M. L. Sant, Chief Constable of Surrey, complained that it was unfair to expect the police to take action against nomads who were unaware of their obligations under the legislation. Sant also argued that, owing to hostility towards the Gypsies at the local level, every school in the country was likely to close its doors to their children and that therefore prosecutions would expose the police to merited criticism.<sup>105</sup> On the advice of a number of Chief Constables, the Home Office drew up handbills to be issued to Gypsies by the police in their area informing them of their obligation to send their children to school, although by this

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<sup>103</sup> HO Memo. 1909. PRO: HO45/11052/173732/43.

<sup>104</sup> Surrey Education Committee, Report of Sub Committee on School Attendance of Gipsy Children 6 July 1910. PRO: HO45/11052/173732/43.

<sup>105</sup> HO Memo., 9 June 1909. PRO: HO45/11052/173732/15.

time prosecutions had already begun in many areas.<sup>106</sup>

As with the concern over vagrancy, the debate over the need to secure the education of the children of wanderers received a great deal of attention in the press. Perhaps surprisingly, some commentators began to express hostility towards what they perceived to be the suppression of a romantic way of life. *The Manchester Guardian* remained sympathetic towards the views of the Gypsy Lore Society throughout its campaign against the legislation.<sup>107</sup> The paper referred to the ‘rosy-faced children in the Gipsy tents’ and wrote of the ‘horror of the idea of forcing them into the slum dwelling population’. In one article the idea of sending the children of nomads to industrial schools was actually compared to forcing Huguenot children into Catholic convents.<sup>108</sup> Similarly *The Referee* employed romantic imagery of the Gypsies in its articles against the legislation:

The Romanés, the real Romanés, will not dwell in houses. They are born for the canopy of heaven, and to force them into mean, close dens in narrow alleys where God’s air never comes would be a lingering death to them. If they may not wander with their children they will be deprived of their young and surely that is cruel.<sup>109</sup>

There was a tendency among those newspapers which opposed the clause to employ the image of a hierarchy within the nomadic population by way of awakening sympathy for the so-called true Gypsies. However, it would appear that such sentiments were merely drafted in to support arguments, which were in reality reflective of the depth of attachment to the idea

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<sup>106</sup> “Gipsy Children and School. First Surrey Prosecutions Under New Act” in *Surrey Times*, 12 March 1910.

<sup>107</sup> See for example “Gipsy Children” in *Manchester Guardian*, 25 Nov 1908. “Gipsy Children in Schools” in *Surrey Advertiser*, 7 May 1910.

<sup>108</sup> “Gipsy Children” in *The Manchester Guardian*, 25 Nov, 1908.

<sup>109</sup> “Gipsy Children” in *The Referee*, 23 Nov 1908.



of Britain as a free land rather than from any interest to safeguard the nomads. After the insertion of the amendment to Clause 118 of the Children's Bill, which exempted them from school at certain times of year, it appears that the measures had the whole-hearted support of the press.<sup>110</sup>

The Conservative Government of the late 1930s considered the number of children who were being removed from school under the 1908 Children's Act, or who were still failing to attend, to be very small. There was even a feeling among a number of politicians that the Act had met with some success in encouraging Gypsies to settle permanently.<sup>111</sup> Following the circulation of handbills in 1910 informing Gypsies, particularly in Surrey, of the provisions of the Children's Act, it was found that the numbers of Gypsies attending school increased dramatically and the Gypsy parents were reported to be keen to ensure their children received an education.<sup>112</sup> There was even a request from the Gypsy community in one area of Surrey in 1926 for evening literacy classes to be provided for adults at the local school.<sup>113</sup>

However, those who had hoped that the Children's Act could be used more effectively as a weapon against nomadism by forcing the Gypsy children into industrial schools persistently complained that, with the amendment clause, the Act was ineffective in meeting

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<sup>110</sup> "The Children's Bill. Passed by the House of Lords" in *The Globe*, 19 Nov 1908. "Schools for Gipsy Children" in *Evening News and St James Gazette*, 20 Oct 1910.

<sup>111</sup> Report to Board of Education on Hampshire Gypsies, 14 July 1944. PRO: ED/11/234.

<sup>112</sup> See correspondence between Home Office and Surrey Police Divisions, PRO: HO45/11052/173732/40a.

<sup>113</sup> Note on request for evening classes by Surrey Gypsies, 1926. PRO: ED41/433.

this end. It was claimed that there continued to be many nomadic parents who failed to send their children to school but that such children were rarely committed to industrial schools owing to the refusal of the local education authorities to pay for this provision. The Children and Young Persons Act passed under the National Government in 1933 went some way to meeting these concerns. Under Section 62 of the Act, the expense for the education of a child committed to an industrial school owing to the wandering habits of his parent, would fall on the Exchequer.<sup>114</sup> The police were also reminded that it was not necessary to obtain a warrant for the arrest of those parents suspected of failing to send their children to school.<sup>115</sup> Nevertheless complaints against the failure of this measure to remove nomads from the road continued until the outbreak of the Second World War. However, it was believed within the Home Office, that public opinion would not stand for the large-scale removal of children of Gypsies into industrial schools.<sup>116</sup> Furthermore, the increase in the school attendance of nomadic children which has already been noted, convinced the Home Office that the new legislative provisions were adequate and the Secretary of State was confident that there had been 'a satisfactory falling off in the number of tramp children'.<sup>117</sup> Thus calls to take more action to increase the school attendance of nomadic children were resisted throughout the early twentieth century.

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<sup>114</sup> MH Minute, 1933. PRO: MH 57/326.

<sup>115</sup> Metropolitan Police, *General Orders and Regulations*, London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1932. pp. 682.

<sup>116</sup> HO Memo., 8 Jan 1904. PRO: HO45/10499/117669.

<sup>117</sup> Home Office Minute 22 Feb 1916. PRO: HO45/11052/173732/51.

## The Moveable Dwelling Campaigns

A further means through which those who wished to bring about the end of nomadism sought to increase state control over such activity came through the regulation of moveable dwellings. The idea that the increased control might induce permanent settlement had been a key factor in the campaigns of George Smith of Coalville during the nineteenth century.<sup>118</sup> However, the first Moveable Dwellings Bill of the twentieth century, which was presented in 1908, represented a departure from the philanthropic concern which had motivated George Smith in his crusade of the 1880s.<sup>119</sup> The renewal of the agitation over Moveable Dwellings was spearheaded by a number of Surrey landowners led by Reginald Justice Bray, Lord Onslow, Lord Farrer and Lord Clifford who were irritated by the presence of Gypsies camping on the common lands in Surrey.<sup>120</sup> Local residents had pestered the landowners for years about the nuisance caused by the nomads.<sup>121</sup> Landowners wrote to the Secretary of State at the Home Office in 1908 to complain both of the presence of Gypsies in Surrey and the

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<sup>118</sup> *Select Committee on Temporary Dwellings Bill, Report with Proceedings of the Committee and Minutes of Evidence*, (1887).

<sup>119</sup> See D. Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth Century Society*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1988. See also E. Hodder, *George Smith of Coalville. The Story of an Enthusiast*, London: J. Nisbet and Co, 1896.

<sup>120</sup> Reasons why campaigns for legislation to regulate nomadism were often spearheaded by residents and local authorities in Surrey are discussed in chapter six.

<sup>121</sup> Quotation taken from "Gipsies as a Terror" in *Pall Mall Gazette*, 9 Oct 1909. See also "Judge and Gipsies. Surrey Overrun with Nomads" in *Grimsby Telegraph*, 9 Oct 1909. Evidence of fears of an increase in the population of Gypsies, particularly in Surrey can be seen in the *Report from the Select Committee (HL) on the Moveable Dwellings Bill*, (1910). Several examples of such views being aired by the popular press can also be found, see for example "The Roaming Romany. Judge Bray Says Most Gipsies Lead Dishonest Lives" in *Daily Sketch*, 9 Oct 1909. see also Strachey Amabel "The Gipsy Scandal and the Danger to the Commons" in *National Review*, 1912. See also "Gipsies in Surrey" in *The Times* 13 May 1910. "Gipsies in Essex" in *The Times*, 22 May 1909.

failure of the Chief Constable to remove them.<sup>122</sup> However, as the Chief Constable of Surrey, Captain Sant pointed out, both to the Home Office and the Association, he could not take action against the Gypsies as they had committed no offence merely by camping on common land owned by the Lord of the Manor.<sup>123</sup> Unable to persuade the police to act illegally by moving the Gypsies with force, in 1909 they founded the Surrey Anti-Vagrancy Association with the aim of banning Gypsies from the districts in which members lived.<sup>124</sup> The Association turned to the Moveable Dwellings Bill as the vehicle of expression for their intention to have the Gypsies banished from Surrey.

The Moveable Dwellings Bills of the early twentieth century must be regarded as assimilationist in their aspirations. The 1908 Bill was concerned with the regulation of dwellings, rather than enforced settlement. However, it included a clause which, had it been passed, would have enabled local authorities to make by-laws to prohibit Gypsy encampments in any place where they were considered to be injurious to health or a source of nuisance to local residents. Effectively, therefore, the Bill could have been used to facilitate the abolition of the nomadic way of life since the local authority could have used by-laws to ban Gypsies from the whole of their area. Surprisingly, perhaps, this clause was not in itself new. Under the 1885 Housing of the Working Classes Act, a local authority could already apply for an injunction to restrain the letting of land for the purpose of a Gypsy encampment if it could be shown that the presence of such a camp would endanger the health of the

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<sup>122</sup> See correspondence between the Home Office and various Surrey landowners and the Chief Constable of the Police in Surrey. PRO: HO45/10995/158231/13.

<sup>123</sup> Correspondence between Justice Bray and Captain Sant of the Surrey Police. PRO: HO45/10995/158231.

<sup>124</sup> The aims of the Anti-Vagrancy Association are laid down in the minutes. SHC: G85/29/8c59a-n.

neighbourhood.<sup>125</sup> Furthermore, the Inclosure Act of 1899 endowed district councils with the power to apply to the Board of Agriculture to make by-laws for the regulation of commons which could be used to prevent Gypsy encampments. Indeed, in 1909 it was reported that the Gypsies of Northumberland were being cleared off the commons through by-laws made under the 1899 Act.<sup>126</sup> In fact, with the exception of one clause, which proposed a system of the enforced registration of all moveable dwellings such as tents and caravans, earlier acts of Parliament included similar clauses to all those advocated by supporters of the Moveable Dwellings Bill. There were already comprehensive provisions dealing with the condition and cleanliness of moveable dwellings in earlier legislation. For example, the 1885 Housing of the Working Classes Act applied the provisions of the 1875 Public Health Act as to nuisances in houses to tents, vans and sheds used for human habitation. The Act dealt with ventilation, overcrowding and the separation of the sexes in moveable dwellings. Additionally, local councils had been granted powers under the 1885 Act to make by-laws to promote cleanliness and control the spread of diseases within such dwellings. These measures applied equally to the housing of the working classes so cannot, in themselves, be viewed as an assimilationist or repressive policy towards van-dwellers. By 1909 few Local Authorities had used their powers to make by-laws under any of the Acts, indicating that Gypsies and moveable dwellings were not in most areas considered a sufficient problem to require legislation. However, a number of local authorities continued to call for a single act which could be put into force against the van dwellers.

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<sup>125</sup> See also Gypsies (Memorandum from the Home Office), Appendix xxxiv, in *Report from the Select Committee [HL] on the Moveable Dwellings Bill*, (1910), Vol. II, pp 167.

<sup>126</sup> *Report of Departmental Committee on Vagrancy., Minutes of Evidence* of Captain James Fullarton, Chief Constable of Northumberland, pp. 257. para. 7560.

Lord Clifford of Chudleigh introduced the 1908 Moveable Dwellings Bill into the House of Lords, with the support of Lord Farrer. A Select Committee was then established to investigate the Bill under the chairmanship of the Marquis of Salisbury and the Committee agreed that a case for further legislation over moveable dwellings had been made out. Despite the legislation which could already be applied to the dwelling places of nomadic people, the Committee remained concerned by the ‘unconventional mode of life’ of the wanderers.<sup>127</sup> Its report reveals through its questions, the existence of a distinct set of stereotypes of nomadic people. Hence, numerous questions were asked of witnesses focusing on whether it was injurious to public health if Gypsies camped together in one place. Witnesses, who included Reginald Bray of the Surrey Anti-Vagrancy Association, spoke of how Gypsies possessed, ‘...the haziest notions of modern sanitary precautions’.<sup>128</sup> However, it was admitted in the report of the Committee that no evidence could be found to prove that any injury to public health had ever been caused by the presence of Gypsies. However, supporters of the Bill such as Lord Onslow and Reginald Bray employed their influence to gain extensive coverage of their views in the local and national press.<sup>129</sup>

Negative images of Gypsies were also used by the Showman’s Guild in arguing that its members should be exempt from any legislation covering moveable dwellings. Mr Horne, the Guild’s chaplain, gave evidence to the Committee informing them that the showmen were a far more respectable class than the Gypsies. He pointed out that:

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<sup>127</sup> *Report from the Select Committee [HL] on the Moveable Dwellings Bill*, (1910), para. 6.

<sup>128</sup> *Report from the Select Committee [HL] on the Moveable Dwellings Bill*, (1910), para. 6.

<sup>129</sup> Letter from Lord Onslow to R. Bray 30 Sept 1909, suggesting contacting reporters to ensure publicity for Bray’s evidence to the House of Lords Select Committee on Moveable Dwellings. SHC: G85/29/8 (36-56).

We have a very strict rule in the Guild with regard to the admission of new members, and in order not to prejudice our own case we refuse to take gipsies, although they may be van-dwellers, and good van-dwellers who still remain gipsies, into membership.<sup>130</sup>

The employment of ideas of a nomadic hierarchy in order to gain a reprieve for a particular section of the travelling population from repressive legislation was not the monopoly of the Showman's Guild. Although the Gypsy Lore Society did not give evidence to the House of Lord's Committee, it embarked on a letter writing campaign against the Moveable Dwellings Bill, and enlisted the help of Earl Russell as representative of its views within the House of Lords. Like the Showman's Guild, the Gypsy Lore Society presented images of a nomadic hierarchy in its political campaign. It was argued that the 'true' Romany should be recognised as superior to the wider travelling community.

The Committee found that, on the whole, none of the nomadic groups was responsible for a significant amount of crime and that on occasions when offences were committed they tended to be minor. However, in their correspondence with members of the Committee the Gypsy Lore Society consistently scapegoated other travellers for the crimes of which pure Gypsies were accused. This tactic can be found in a letter to Lord Farrer protesting against the Moveable Dwellings Bill, written by Macfie. Macfie's argument was that enforced settlement could have a degenerative effect on the character of the true Romany but that this would not be the case with regards to other travellers:

As for the half-breeds and tramps, I know them of course and - equally of course dislike them...They live in the country as they would live in a town

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<sup>130</sup> *Report from the Select Committee [HL] on the Moveable Dwellings Bill., Minutes of Evidence* of Thomas Horne, Chaplain of the Showman's Guild, (1909), para. 1610.

slum, and it could come as no great hardship to force them back to their natural environment.<sup>131</sup>

Thus any impact which the scholars of the Gypsy Lore Society made on the minds of those who advocated the Bill was gained by reaffirming the idea of racial distinctions among nomadic peoples and the idea that nomads who failed to live up to romantic stereotypes of Gypsies were degenerates or impostors and deserved no reprieve from repressive legislation.

The lines of argument used by the Gypsy Lore Society and the Showman's Guild were clearly reflected in the proceedings and report of the Committee. From Horne's evidence the Committee concluded that the showmen were a '...perfectly honest and respectable...' people against whom no grievances arose.<sup>132</sup> The report divided the van-dwelling population into two classes, 'the showman class and the gipsy class' and expressed sympathy for the showmen and the way in which their livelihood was already frustrated by existing legislation.<sup>133</sup> Furthermore, the report pointed out that not all the remaining members of the van-dwelling population were Gypsies and that '...many are not pure gipsies'.<sup>134</sup> It was added that the 'Gypsy class' was also made up of tramps and seasonal workers who resided in the towns and moved into the country to take part in the annual pea-picking or hop-picking harvest. It was suggested that there was a need to distinguish between the true Gypsies and the tramps for: 'These later wanderers belong to a class altogether inferior to the gipsies'.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Letter from R. A. S Macfie to Lord Farrer, 20 Aug 1908. [SMGC A26-A30].

<sup>132</sup> *Report from the Select Committee [HL] on the Moveable Dwellings Bill*, (1910), para. 1.

<sup>133</sup> *Report from the Select Committee [HL] on the Moveable Dwellings Bill*, (1910), para. 1.

<sup>134</sup> *Report from the Select Committee [HL] on the Moveable Dwellings Bill*, (1910), para. 2.

<sup>135</sup> *Report from the Select Committee [HL] on the Moveable Dwellings Bill*, (1910), para. 2.



Such ideas of hierarchy armed advocates of the Bill with a powerful tool in the debate, for it could be suggested that the measures were aimed at repressing only those Gypsies who committed crimes. Indeed, Reginald Bray argued that: 'I believe the real gipsies would welcome such provisions'.<sup>136</sup> The drawing up of distinctions, racial or social, between members of the nomadic population had never been the object of the Committee and therefore the distinctions appear in the report only as a by-product of the investigation. Yet such distinctions illustrate the extent to which ideas about the existence of a hierarchy among travellers were held throughout society.

The Select Committee on Moveable Dwellings declared itself to be anti-assimilationist. It recommended that where van-dwellers camped in large numbers they should be provided with regulated sites by the County Council (although it seemed to be an underlying assumption that if such sites could be found they would be kept under police surveillance). Registration, which was the only really new provision in the Bill, was ruled impractical on the grounds that often a moveable dwelling was simply '...pieces of tarpaulin on a couple of stakes'.<sup>137</sup> The Committee considered that it would be impossible to draw up regulations covering the inspection and registration of such accommodation. With regards to registration it was also pointed out that the 1835 Highways Act, which required the owners of vans and carts to bear their name in letters an inch high on the vehicle was already obeyed by Gypsies and travellers so that identification was already possible.

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<sup>136</sup> Letter from R. Bray to Surrey County Council, 1912. SHC: cc28/249a.

<sup>137</sup> *Report from the Select Committee [HL] on the Moveable Dwellings Bill*, (1910), para. 9.

The proposal for camping grounds to be provided by the local authorities was met with a good deal of opposition both from supporters and opponents of the Bill. Local councils were opposed to the idea of being made responsible for the provision of the sites and Chief Constable Captain Sant of Surrey, claimed that organised camps would create new problems:

I have known instances in which gipsies have hired a field, have had water laid on, closets erected and sanitary regulations so far observed. The result has been that residents in the locality of the camp have found their neighbours a much greater nuisance as a congregation than when scattered over the wide commons and wastes...<sup>138</sup>

The presence of nomads on the common lands was regarded as distasteful, as this letter indicates, and many supporters of the Bill hoped it would increase the powers of local authorities to drive them away, rather than to provide them with designated camping grounds.

The 1908 Moveable Dwellings Bill was eventually dropped from the political agenda in the face of more pressing issues. The report of the Committee was not acted upon and no permanent Gypsy sites were established. However, there continued to be calls for more control over moveable dwellings throughout the early twentieth century. In July 1911 a group of Norfolk magistrates passed a resolution that it would be advisable if van dwellers had registration numbers like motorcars so that they were more traceable.<sup>139</sup> More notably, there were a number of fresh attempts to place a Moveable Dwellings Act on to the statute books over the following two decades. Lord Clifford of Chudleigh presented a bill in 1913 similar to the 1908 edition and further Moveable Dwellings Bills were presented by the Rural

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<sup>138</sup> Letter from Captain M.L Sant to the Secretary of State, 19 July 1910. PRO: HO45/10995/158231/25.

<sup>139</sup> HO Memo. 4 July 1911. PRO: HO45/10995/158231/17.

District Councils Association in 1923, 1924-1925 and 1926.<sup>140</sup> The later attempts to introduce moveable dwellings legislation stemmed from wider concerns over the increase in camping for leisure as well as a desire to increase control over nomads. However, as camping and caravanning became increasingly popular leisure pursuits during the early twentieth century, the chances of those who viewed the introduction of legislation on moveable dwellings as a way of controlling Gypsies were considerably weakened. During the inter-war years the trailer caravans of holidaymakers became an increasingly common sight in the summer months. Likewise, hiking, rambling and camping boomed particularly during the 1930s.<sup>141</sup> In 1926, when Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Granville Wheler presented another Moveable Dwellings Bill, Mackenzie Livingstone of the Ministry of Housing referred to it as:

...a Bill which, while claiming to diminish certain nuisances, will in fact injure the rights of persons camping for recreation and pleasure and place one more obstacle in the way of the mass of people seeking to enjoy their heritage of fresh air and natural beauty.<sup>142</sup>

Even the Royal Sanitary Institute, which welcomed the provisions in the Bill as far as they could be applied to Gypsies, recognised that some amendment would need to be included so as to ensure that legislation would not infringe on the rights of holiday campers. Complaints about the repressive tone of the Bill were made by numerous camping, caravanning and climbing clubs, and those who were involved in the manufacturing and hiring out of caravans also expressed grave concerns about the proposed legislation. It was believed within the

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<sup>140</sup> *Bills to provide for the regulation of Moveable Dwellings*: 1923; (86) ii. 695. 1924 ;(47) iii. 587 [not printed]. 1924-25; (94) iii 473. 1926; (72) iii 691. See also *Report from the Select Committee [HL] on the Moveable Dwellings Bill*, (1910).

<sup>141</sup> J. Stevenson, *British Society 1914-45*, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1984. pp. 391-392.

<sup>142</sup> Memo. on the 1926 Moveable Dwellings Bill. PRO: HLG 52/411.

Government that the Bill was identical with earlier attempts of legislation.<sup>143</sup> Furthermore, it was believed that it would be almost impossible to introduce legislation dealing with moveable dwellings which would not infringe on the rights of those who used such accommodation for leisure. By 1926 both the Home Office and the Ministry of Health considered that there were already ample provisions in existing legislation with which local authorities could deal with Gypsies who posed a nuisance. The Home Office recommended that those local authorities which continued to be troubled by the presence of travellers, should deal with them by placing the land under regulation through schemes approved by the Ministry of Agriculture under the Commons Acts.<sup>144</sup> Such a scheme was introduced, in fact, in Sussex after the Commons and Footpaths Preservation Society recommended the regulation of all the land on which Gypsies had been accustomed to camp.<sup>145</sup> However, there remained a significant amount of support for further legislation particularly among the landowners and county councillors of Surrey.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Memo. on the 1926 Moveable Dwellings Bill. PRO: HLG 52/411.

<sup>144</sup> Home Office minute, 6 April 1921. PRO: HO45/10995/158231/67.

<sup>145</sup> Home Office minute, 6 April 1921. PRO: HO45/10995/158231/67. "Rural Beauty. How to Deal with Gipsies" in *The Times*, 4 April 1921.

<sup>146</sup> Letter from Lord E. Percy to Kingsley Wood, 27 June 1927. PRO: HLG 52/411.

## The State and the Scottish Tinkers



(6. A Tinker's encampment on the west coast of Argyll c. 1910. During the First World War it became increasingly difficult for such groups to find land on which to camp and many such families were forced into slum accommodation in the towns).

Hitherto the focus of this chapter has been on the initiatives taken by British Governments in response to concerns over the nomadic people of England and Wales. There has been reason to notice events in Scotland such as the arrival of the latter groups of German Gypsies in 1906 and the death in custody of elderly Scottish itinerant Thomas Farr. Yet the main emphasis has remained on England and Wales where the 1824 Vagrancy Legislation was used most extensively and the campaigns for Moveable Dwellings legislation evolved. In fact there has been a relative absence of academic study of the situation faced by Scottish

nomads during this period. However, this neglect has obscured an important series of events affecting itinerant groups in Scotland, which began during the First World War and continued into the 1930s. This chapter will now turn to consider the particular situation faced by Scottish nomads during this period and the ways in which ideas about Gypsies which have already been considered shaped responses to them.

The events began in 1916 when the problems faced by itinerant groups during the First World War were brought to the attention of the Scottish Office. This wartime interest in Scotland's nomadic population is perhaps surprising, in view of the earlier observation that concern over the presence of itinerants on Britain's roads declined with the onset of the War. However, whereas in England and Wales interest in the Gypsies during this period was largely confined to small scale and localised missionary activity, in Scotland a united attempt was made by the Scottish churches to bring about the assimilation of nomadic groups. This effort, co-ordinated by the Central Committee for the Welfare of Tinkers, a joint committee of the Scottish Churches established in 1916, succeeded in bringing the plight of the Scottish itinerants to the attention of the authorities in a way which did not occur in England and Wales. And, in response to pressure from the Central Committee, the Department of Health of the Scottish Office established the 1917-18 Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland, to investigate the living conditions of Scotland's nomadic population during the War.

This is not to suggest that the conditions facing Scottish itinerants during the War were any worse than those facing the English and Welsh Gypsies, indeed there does not

appear to be any evidence to suggest this was the case. In fact the circumstance brought about by the War caused a number of problems for British nomads wherever they resided. One such difficulty was caused by the Defence of the Realm Regulations, which prevented itinerants from setting up camp and lighting fires in many areas. The difficulties experienced by the travellers in finding campsites were accentuated by the severe winter of 1916-17 which drove many such families into the towns where there was a great scarcity of accommodation owing to a doubling in the cost of building accompanied by a sharp rise in interest rates.<sup>147</sup> Furthermore, it was reported that where the nomads attempted to move into town housing during the War, they often met with opposition from local residents. For example, in 1917, two women from Thurso in Scotland went before a meeting of the town council to voice their objections to having Tinker neighbours.<sup>148</sup> The fact that many landlords and other town dwellers were unhappy with the idea of Gypsy neighbours and tenants meant that often only the worst kind of slum accommodation was available for the travellers and that in some areas derelict housing had to be opened up for them.<sup>149</sup>

Other problems arose. In 1918 it was claimed that the practice of setting German prisoners of war to work in the agricultural sector had considerably reduced employment opportunities for nomads.<sup>150</sup> A further difficulty was caused by the fact that, during the early stages of the War, the right of families of those at the Front to a separation allowance was calculated entirely on the basis of a woman's relationship to her partner. It was argued that

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<sup>147</sup> J. Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1986. pp. 242-243.

<sup>148</sup> Letter from the Provost of Callander to Scottish Secretary, 23 March 1917. NAS: HH55/237.

<sup>149</sup> *Report of the Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland*, (1918), para. 3.

<sup>150</sup> Letter to Scottish Secretary from R. Menzies-Ferguson, 3 Oct 1918. NAS: HH55/237.

paying a separation allowance to women who were not legally married to the men with whom they shared a home or had children could be seen as condoning immorality. Thus those individuals who were not married in accordance with British law were not automatically eligible for an allowance.<sup>151</sup>

In Scotland, the Central Committee for the Welfare of the Tinkers, chaired by Dr R. Menzies Ferguson, was concerned about the conditions under which the Tinkers were living in the War. However, the aim of the Central Committee went beyond an interest in improving the living conditions of the travellers. The Central Committee was assimilationist in its aspirations for the Tinkers and viewed the changes forced upon the people by the war as an opportunity to facilitate their permanent settlement. In particular, it suggested that the separation allowance could be used as a means to encourage the Tinkers to settle and called for new rules to prevent women receiving their allowance at more than one post office.<sup>152</sup>

In line with the ideas of the Central Committee for the Welfare of the Tinkers, the Departmental Committee established by the Scottish Office seemed to assume a responsibility for assisting the assimilation of the nomads. The latter Committee was deeply impressed by the views of a number of writers from the previous two centuries. The influence of the work of Heinrich Grellmann can be found in the report, which also quoted the work of the nineteenth century missionaries and writers on Gypsies, John Hoyland and John Baird.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Eventually it was decided that the allowance would have to be paid to unmarried women in certain circumstances, but by this time there had already been a significant delay. H. Jones, *Health and Society in Twentieth Century Britain*, London: Longman, 1994. pp. 35-36.

<sup>152</sup> Letter from R. Munro to R. Menzies Ferguson, 7 July 1917. NAS: HH/55/237.

<sup>153</sup> J. Baird, *The Scottish Gypsies' Advocate*, Edinburgh: John Lindsay, 1839.



Hoyland had argued that it was the duty of a civilised society to ‘...humanise a people who, for centuries, have wandered in error and neglect’ and the Committee remained faithful to this objective throughout its investigation.<sup>154</sup> The Departmental Committee considered the prevailing conditions caused by the war as the perfect context for inducing the travellers to settle on a more permanent basis and reported that:

...the time is ripe for an attempt at economic absorption, and, in our view, it would constitute a grave reproach to the government of a civilised state if they failed to take effective measures to facilitate that end.<sup>155</sup>

Furthermore, it was noted that:

The services of the men in the Army demanded recognition on the part of the country; and it was felt that it would be unfair, both to the tinkers and to the community, to permit the return of discharged soldiers to their former wretched existence.<sup>156</sup>

However, although the Departmental Committee applauded the work of figures such as Hoyland and Baird, it had difficulty reconciling such harsh condemnation of the character of the Tinkers with the contrary evidence that it collected during the course of its investigations. For example, though Baird had written in graphic detail of the insanitary habits of the Gypsies, it was found that, despite their inferior state, the houses of Tinkers were generally kept clean and tidy. Yet despite such findings the 1917-18 Committee on the Welfare of the

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<sup>154</sup> J. Hoyland, *Historical Survey of Gypsies*, 1816, pp. 195.

<sup>155</sup> *Report of the Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland*, (1918), para. 146.

<sup>156</sup> *Report of the Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland*, (1918), para. 3.

Tinkers was unable to look beyond existing negative stereotypes of the Tinkers and such images are evident throughout its report.<sup>157</sup>

During the course of its investigations the Departmental Committee heard from medical officers, doctors, school inspectors and others. All these representatives were attached to negative perception of the Tinkers and their evidence frequently supported the image of the Tinker as both a social nuisance and a potential threat to sedentary society. In one witness statement, the former General Secretary of the Scottish N.S.P.C.C., Mr Ninian Hall, referred to the nomads as ‘social outcasts’ and expressed abhorrence for what he considered to be ‘...a parasitic life which subsists on the industry and thrift of others.’<sup>158</sup> Further accounts expressed the opinion that the Tinkers were a dirty people and posed a danger to public health whenever they resided in a neighbourhood.<sup>159</sup> The idea that a great deal of sexual immorality occurred amongst nomadic people also surfaced during the investigation.<sup>160</sup> Significantly, a number of witnesses also argued that the condition of the Tinkers was worsening. For example, Dr John Macay, Medical Officer of Health for Aberfeldy, told the inquiry that the ‘...adult tinker is getting more in the style of the

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<sup>157</sup> For example the Committee appear to have assumed that the popular negative stereotype of the Tinker as a kidnapper had some historical foundation *Report of the Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland*, (1918), para. 34.

<sup>158</sup> *Report of the Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland*, (1918), par. 64.

<sup>159</sup> Correspondence of the Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland, (1918) NAS: HH55/237. In particular see the letter from the Chief Constable of Argyll, 6 February 1919.

<sup>160</sup> Written statement of A. McCormick to Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland, (1918), NAS: HH61/77.

tramp'.<sup>161</sup> Such claims served to give the question of how to deal with the Tinkers, a sense of urgency.

The Departmental Committee also considered some of the work of David MacRitchie and T. H. Crofton of the Gypsy Lore Society, and Andrew McCormick, also a member of the Society, provided written evidence to the inquiry. In tune with the investigations of members of the Gypsy Lore Society the Committee considered that although 'Tinker' was a trade name, the group had probably once been a 'caste of great antiquity.'<sup>162</sup> Also consistent with the ideas of the Society, the report noted that the nomads possessed an innate tendency towards wandering. The written evidence of Andrew McCormick made a significant impression on the Committee. During the early twentieth century many scholars investigated the English and Welsh Gypsies whom they considered a primitive and romantic race, distinct from the sedentary population. McCormick was one of a tiny number of scholars who similarly examined the language, culture and appearance of the Scottish nomads and attempted to prove that they too were a romantic race with a strong strain of 'Gypsy blood'.<sup>163</sup> However, although he held romantic sentiments about the wandering way of life, McCormick argued that not all Tinkers could be regarded as admirable people. He argued that a process of degeneration was underway and would be speeded up if the Tinkers were forced into slums. He claimed that increased association between the Tinkers and slum dwellers would

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<sup>161</sup> *Report of the Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland*, (1918), para. 44.

<sup>162</sup> *Report of the Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland*, (1918), para. 11-13.

<sup>163</sup> A. McCormick, *The Tinkler Gypsies*, Dumfries: Maxwell and Son, 1907, p xi.

lead to increasing numbers of half-breeds, who, he pointed out were far more troublesome than the purer breed.<sup>164</sup>

Although the Departmental Committee remained open to the idea that at an unspecified time in history the Tinkers had been an industrious and highly skilled people, the weight of the negative stereotypes of the group presented in the accounts of witnesses came to shape its report. To a certain extent its adherence to negative stereotypes was inevitable. Its chairman was in fact none other than Dr R. Menzies Ferguson, who also chaired the Central Committee for the Welfare of Tinkers founded by the Scottish churches. Given the assimilationist aspirations of the Central Committee there can be little surprise that the Departmental Committee was anxious to emphasise the disreputable character of the Tinker and the urgency of bringing about his reformation and permanent settlement.

By way of justifying its assimilationist aspirations for the Tinkers, the Departmental Committee drew upon ideas of degeneration. It was made clear that some form of deterioration was underway among the Tinkers. The report was not specific as to whether this process of degeneration was racial, social, economic or moral in character. However, it was suggested that they had ceased to be a productive people in themselves and had instead developed into ‘...a class of parasites living off the industry of others’.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Copy of written evidence of A. McCormick to the *Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland*, (1918), Appendix No 4. NAS: HH 61/77.

<sup>165</sup> *Report of the Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland*, (1918), para. 143.

In keeping with the ideas of the Gypsy Lore Society, it was maintained that the Tinkers were a far more respectable sector of the nomadic population than the tramps. Therefore, it was recommended that the Tinkers should be encouraged to settle and not forced into labour colonies, a fate believed to be deserving of the tramp.<sup>166</sup> It was considered that the Tinkers had an innate inability to adapt to 'civilised' society. Thus a number of proposals made by the Committee were aimed at placing the group under supervision in order to aid it in the transition to settled life. The report advocated the appointment of an Inspector of Tinkers with a role analogous to that of Inspector of Poor. The Inspector's role was explained in the report which urged:

He should shepherd them continually until such time as they are able to take their place among responsible and self-respecting citizens.<sup>167</sup>

The proposed role of the Inspector of Tinkers was clearly motivated by an aspiration to exercise paternalistic guidance over a people widely perceived as being misguided and primitive. This belief also led the Committee to the opinion that the Tinker women required supervision in the management of the separation allowance. It was claimed that although separation allowances would enable them to pay the rents in the towns:

...the possession of regular incomes- an entire novelty for many- would lead to abuse, particularly as they had no training in the spending of money.<sup>168</sup>

In addition, a number of members of the Committee also argued that the Tinkers should be prohibited from buying alcohol. Various witnesses had remarked on the primitive nature of

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<sup>166</sup> *Report of the Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland*, (1918), para. 189.

<sup>167</sup> *Report of the Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland*, (1918), para. 18.

<sup>168</sup> *Report of the Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland*, (1918), para. 3.

the Tinkers and suggested that ‘...just as drink should be kept from children so ought it to be denied to the tinker’.<sup>169</sup> Mr J. Macmaster Campbell, Sheriff Substitute of Campbeltown supported this opinion and added that it was vital to keep alcohol from them ‘on the same ground as we justify the prohibition of the sale of liquor to Indians, because the Tinker is an undeveloped person just as the Indian is’.<sup>170</sup>

Further proposals made by the Departmental Committee had the dual purpose of making the nomadic way of life increasingly difficult, if not illegal, and of socialising the Tinkers into accepting the ways of sedentary society. It was claimed that full time school attendance was vital if the Tinkers were to be assimilated into the settled community. Thus the Committee recommended the removal of the sub-clause of the 1908 Children’s Act which exempted the children of travellers from schools at certain times of year. Furthermore, its report called for those who persisted in taking their children on their travels to be prevented from obtaining hawkers’ licences. Despite the paternalistic tone of the report, the importance of assimilating the Tinkers was clear and the Departmental Committee advocated sending those who refused to settle, to a labour colony along with the tramps, should the Government decide to establish such a system. The report concluded in an optimistic tone, proclaiming that if its recommendations were acted upon within two generations the Tinker would have ceased to exist.

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<sup>169</sup> *Report of the Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland*, (1918), para. 73.

<sup>170</sup> Evidence of J. Macmaster Campbell, Sherriff Substitute of Campbelown quoted in *Report of the Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland*, (1918), para. 73. The witness’s used the term ‘race’ in a vague sense but probably regarded the Tinkers in terms of a cultural rather than a biologically defines group.

A number of prominent individuals communicated with the Scottish Office to show their support for a scheme for the settlement of the Tinkers, including the Chief Constable of Argyll, H. S. Turnbull, who wrote that:

I am of the opinion that legislation requires to be introduced to wipe out, ultimately, the whole race of tinkers.<sup>171</sup>

However, the Committee's report did not lead to a great deal of action. Under Lloyd George's Liberal Government, the Home Office remained strongly opposed to the recommendation of permanent school attendance. It was believed that the nomads would almost certainly fail to comply with such a provision, which was unfair on those who did not neglect their children. Furthermore it was believed that the provision would be used by local authorities as a means to harass the Gypsies through repeated prosecutions, while the Local Education Authorities continued to refuse to pay for the children of those prosecuted to be sent to industrial schools.<sup>172</sup> The Home Office also opposed the introduction of restrictions on the granting of peddler's certificates, an action which would have made it impossible for many nomads with children to make a living within the law.

In 1919 the Scottish Board of Health did attempt to induce county councils to convert unused army huts into permanent dwelling places for the Tinkers. However, the county authorities refused, arguing that until the working classes were adequately housed, it was out of the question to provide housing for the Tinkers.<sup>173</sup> When Perth County Council appointed a

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<sup>171</sup> Letter from the Chief Constable of Argyll to the Scottish Office, 6 Feb 1919. NAS: HH55/237.

<sup>172</sup> Secretary of State minute, 1 Mar 1922. PRO: HO45/11052/1732/56.

<sup>173</sup> Letter to the Scottish Office from the Central Committee on for the Welfare of Tinkers, 11 July 1924. NAS: HH55/240.

sub-committee to consider the proposals of the Departmental Committee, it reported that the recommendations were unnecessarily expensive and elaborate. Furthermore, it was claimed that if houses were allocated to the Tinkers there was likely to be a strong movement among other unfortunate people towards inclusion in the ranks of the Tinker population.<sup>174</sup> It was also argued that the scheme of appointing an Inspector of Tinkers was too expensive and that county councils could not be expected to pay for what was essentially a national problem. There can be little doubt that the preference for keeping the Tinkers out of a particular locality completely was often behind the unwillingness of authorities to support such schemes. Even the Chief Constable of Argyll, who was so keen to bring about the assimilation of the Tinkers, was anxious to point out that the county of Argyll would not be at all appropriate as a place to settle the nomads.<sup>175</sup> Thus the assimilationist aspirations of the Committee were barred by the more short-term concerns of the local authorities.

Those who had supported the recommendations of the Committee such as the Scottish NSPCC and the Central Committee for the Welfare of the Tinkers soon began to express their disappointment at the failure of the Scottish Office to instigate the reforms.<sup>176</sup> The Central Committee for the Tinkers was particularly disappointed by the failure of the Government to take action on the report and in 1925 in a deputation to the Scottish Secretary urged that the recommendations of the Committee be put into place. The Central Committee claimed that the Tinkers were now more inclined to settle than ever but houses were unobtainable for them

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<sup>174</sup> Perth County Council, Observations of a Sub-Committee appointed to Consider the Report of the Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland. 31 Jan 1919. NAS: HH55/237.

<sup>175</sup> Letter from the Chief Constable of Argyllshire to the Scottish Office, 6 Feb 1919. NAS: HH55/237.

<sup>176</sup> Letter to the Central Committee for the Welfare of the Tinkers from John Macay, NSPCC Inspector, 3 April 1919. NAS: HH55/237.



as a result of the prejudices of landlords. The deputation called for action to be taken to compel the county councils to provide camping grounds. It was also argued that the local authorities could and should enforce full time school attendance for the Tinker children. It was claimed additionally that the traditional occupations which had led the Tinkers to travel during the summer months had now died out and that they now lived by begging, which did not give them a legal exemption under the 1908 Children's Act.<sup>177</sup> Leaders of the deputation also voiced concerns that Tinkers who had served in the forces were being discharged and returning to their wandering way of life; urgent action was required to prevent this trend.<sup>178</sup> However, the Scottish Secretary remained convinced that no action could be taken to compel county councils to provide camp sites and the Home Office remained strongly opposed to full school attendance for the nomads.

In a sense, the Tinkers were saved from the harsh and assimilationist proposals of the Departmental Committee by the antipathy expressed towards them by the local councils. Although representatives of the various county councils of Scotland wrote scores of letters to the Scottish Office to complain about the presence of Tinkers during the early twentieth century, they were adamant that they should not carry the cost of any schemes aimed at their settlement. The local authorities might call for increased powers to move on the Tinkers, for the establishment of labour colonies or for increased prison sentences for habitual wanderers. However, despite their evident wish to be rid of the nomadic population they bitterly resented calls for them to finance any reforms aimed at settling or improving the condition of these

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<sup>177</sup> Minutes of Meeting at Scottish Board of Health between Scottish secretary and the Joint Committee of the Churches in Regard to the Welfare of the Scottish Tinkers, 4 June 1925. NAS: HH61/80.

<sup>178</sup> "Tinkers' Return" in *Peoples Journal*, 31 May 1919.

people. The nomads were widely regarded as a dishonest and parasitic sector of the population who, as they were not settled in any particular locality, had no genuine claims to the services of the local authorities.

### **Health, Housing and Town Planning**

Throughout the early twentieth century successive Governments remained unwilling to implement controls on the nomadic life. Indeed, even the press, which hurled damning accusations at the Gypsies, seemed to jump to their defence on occasions when legislation was threatened which it considered to be too heavy handed. Many of the newspapers had come down strongly on the side of the Gypsies over the issue of the Moveable Dwellings Bill and the controversy over the passing of the Children's Act. The press campaigns drew on distinctions between members of the nomadic population and claimed that travellers should not be treated as a single category. It was claimed that, while the Committee on Moveable Dwellings had distinguished between only the showman class and the Gypsy class, there were other important distinctions to be made when considering the nomadic population. It was pointed out that the genuine Gypsies were a very honourable people while the tramps constituted a criminal class and were inferior to the Gypsies.<sup>179</sup> The authorities were well aware that any legislation introduced to deal with vagrancy or moveable dwellings, would be perceived as an illiberal measure which would harass all nomads, regardless of whether they were guilty of a crime.<sup>180</sup> The nomadic population was not, at least in theory, universally

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<sup>179</sup> See, for example, "The Roaming Romany. Judge Bray Says Most Gipsies Lead Dishonest Lives" in *Daily Sketch*, 9 Oct 1909.

<sup>180</sup> HO Memo, 8 Jan 1904. PRO: HO45/10499/117669.

despised and as long as the romantic stereotype of the wandering life persisted, it was clear that any attempts to interfere with the rights of nomads would be regarded as repressive.

The Home Office was also aware that permitting by-laws that increased the powers of the local authorities in one area to drive away its Gypsy population simply moved the problem to another locality. Thus Governments became increasingly wary of ratifying by-laws, which had the clear object of increasing the power of the authorities to move the Gypsies on or prevent them from setting up camp. However, throughout the early twentieth century numerous local councils campaigned for by-laws and other such powers to deal with Gypsies at the local level and in the first few years of the century some local authorities were successful in gaining new powers. For example, in 1906 the County Council of Middlesex (General Powers) Act was passed giving the local authorities of Middlesex special powers for dealing with nomads. Increasingly though, the Government became disinclined to allow such legislation just as it was wary of dealing with Gypsies through moveable dwellings legislation. Instead there was a tendency to adopt a piecemeal approach gradually adding to the layers of regulations through broader legislation. Hence, when during the 1920s and 30s a catalogue of town planning, health and housing legislation was introduced in Britain such legislation was regarded as a means through which the local authorities could improve the physical, moral and social character of the people within their area.<sup>181</sup> Thus the legislation often included provisions for the local authorities to take action where the condition or

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<sup>181</sup> J. Cullingworth, *Town and Country Planning in Britain*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1976 (First published in 1964). pp. 15.

occupancy of accommodation was considered to be detrimental to the health or moral well-being of the people. Such legislation might include clauses which could be used to frustrate the lives of nomadic groups at the local level and indeed by 1939 a set of comprehensive measure had come into being which gave local authorities new powers to deal with the nomads.

The Government recommended that where encampments were not of a permanent nature the 1925 Law of Property Act could be used to secure the removal of the Gypsies. The Act applied to all metropolitan commons and other commons, which were within an urban district and could be extended to further areas of common land on application to the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.<sup>182</sup> Under the Act anyone who placed a vehicle or a tent on the common or lit a fire without permission was guilty of an offence and could be fined up to forty shillings. In 1927 Hurtwood Common in Surrey was brought under the 1925 Act. The common had been a popular site among nomadic families for many years. However, under the Act the local authorities were able to restrict the use of the land by the travellers. A scheme of camping by permit only was introduced and by 1932 the number of families able to camp on the land at any one time had been set at around thirty.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Note on Commons by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, PRO: HLG 52/404.

<sup>183</sup> D. Maitland, *An Account of Gipsy Camps in Surrey Supervised by Hurtwood Control Committee with Bearing on Tinker Camps in Scotland*, 1932. NAS: HH55/241.

The problems for Gypsies who sought short-term campsites on the commons or on rented ground were accentuated further with the Public Health Act of 1936. In the past, police and local authorities had often been unable to act against Gypsies camped on land which belonged to the Lord of the Manor or other private landowners. Even in cases where the Gypsies had not obtained permission to camp on the land, the authorities were unable to take action without the permission of the landowner. Furthermore, as Chief Constable of Surrey, Captain M. L. Sant, pointed out, even where the police had been given permission to move the nomads they had no real powers to do so unless they were proven to be guilty of a crime.<sup>184</sup> However, under the 1936 Public Health Act any nuisance arising from the use of a tent or van could result in legal proceedings being taken against the owner of the land on sanitary grounds.<sup>185</sup> If the Lord of the Manor refused to give consent to the eviction of Gypsies or allowed them to stay on the land, he could be liable for any subsequent problems judged to be their responsibility. In practice, however, any such prosecution was highly unlikely since the landowner could always claim in his defence that the tent or van had been on the land without authority.<sup>186</sup> However, it would appear that after the 1936 Public Health Act, many more landlords were disinclined to allow Gypsies to camp on their land.<sup>187</sup> The clause could have had little other effect than to reduce the number of places in which Gypsies could legitimately settle and, at the same time, make it increasingly easy for the authorities to secure their removal after they had arrived.

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<sup>184</sup> See correspondence between the Home Office and various Surrey landowners and the Chief Constable of the Police in Surrey. PRO: HO45/10995/158231/13.

<sup>185</sup> *Second Interim Report of the Local Government and Public Health Consolidation Committee*. 1936, Cmd 5059, xi.

<sup>186</sup> *Report of the Committee on Vagrancy in Scotland*, (1936), para. 90.

By the end of the 1930s there was also a good deal of legislation which could be used by local authorities to secure the removal of long-term encampments. The Town and Country Planning Act of 1932 included provisions which it was hoped would help the local authorities to prevent the appearance of ‘unsatisfactory’ encampments of a permanent nature.<sup>188</sup> The Act enabled local authorities to exercise control over the use of caravans and other temporary structures on the land. Even where the local authorities could not prevent an area being used for residential purposes, they were empowered to control the siting and the appearance of structures placed on it. The 1936 Public Health Act also gave local authorities considerable powers to prohibit the use of temporary and moveable dwellings wherever they were considered to be a nuisance, injurious to health or unfit for human habitation. In fact, a number of the clauses contained in the Public Health Act bore a striking similarity to those contained in the Moveable Dwellings Bills which governments had always been keen to block. Indeed, the Showman’s Guild considered certain clauses to be simply ‘...revised editions of the Moveable Dwellings Bill’.<sup>189</sup> Under the Act, local authorities could obtain clearance orders to move such dwellings wherever they had remained in the same place for a period of two years. The Act also required the owner of an area of land that was to be used for camping for more than sixty days per year to obtain a licence. It was certainly made clear that the legislation was aimed at those groups who lived a nomadic way of life, and was not intended to apply to those people who used tents and caravans for leisure. Permits granting

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<sup>187</sup> *Public Health Act*, 26 Geo V and 1 Edw VII., ch 49 (1936). para. 268.

<sup>188</sup> Memo. on the powers of the 1932 Town and Country Planning Act with regard to moveable dwellings, PRO: HLG/52/404.

<sup>189</sup> Murphy, *History of the Showman’s Guild*, pp. 201.

exemption from the provisions of the Act were to be granted to any organisation, which could satisfy the Ministry of Health that its sites were properly managed.<sup>190</sup> Camping and caravanning organisations and scout groups were able to gain exemption from the Act and so was the Showman's Guild.<sup>191</sup> However, no campaign was waged on behalf of the Gypsies and the Act became a means through which local authorities could secure the removal of permanent encampments.

The Housing Acts of 1930, 1935 and 1936 increased the difficulties encountered by travellers on permanent or semi-permanent sites and those who took to settled housing during the winter while their children completed the school attendances required of them by the 1908 Children's Act. Under the 1930 Act a local authority could secure the demolition of any dwelling house shown to be unfit for human habitation. The slum clearance schemes carried out by many local authorities under this Act caused considerable difficulties for travellers who had been accustomed to taking up the cheapest housing in the towns while they settled for the winter. There was already a housing shortage in Britain and the replacement of unfit housing was notoriously slow, with higher rents often placing it out of reach of its previous inhabitants.<sup>192</sup> Therefore those areas with affordable rent that remained available became heavily overcrowded. However, the 1935 Housing Act defined overcrowding precisely and made it a statutory offence. Furthermore, under Section 80 of the Act, it was made clear that powers to order the demolition, closing, or repair of buildings, could be applied to moveable

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<sup>190</sup> Ministry of Health Circular to Town and District Councils, 1 May 1937. PRO: HLG 52/1150.

<sup>191</sup> Explanatory Memorandum by the Minister of Health; 1935-36 Cmd 5238. xx 1043.

<sup>192</sup> Gainer, *The Alien Invasion*, pp. 37.

or temporary structures where they had remained in the same place for more than two years. Thus, whether the nomads chose to take to settled accommodation, to camp on their own land or the land of others, the legislation of the 1930s could be used to move them on and frustrate their way of life.

The particular problems faced by nomadic people during the 1930s were brought to the attention of the Scottish Office by the Home Mission Committee of the Church of Scotland which had taken over the work of the Central Committee on the Welfare of the Tinkers. The Scottish Secretary was reported to be particularly concerned over the issue of the nomads owing to the increase in vagrancy which was believed to have occurred with the onset of industrial depression.<sup>193</sup> In 1934 the Scottish Office ordered an enquiry into the living conditions of nomadic groups. The Committee's report reveals the extent of the problems caused for the nomads by the legislation of the 1930s. It was noted that this legislation was leading to a situation where the Tinkers were being driven from place to place, unable to find either housing in the towns in winter or places to camp during the summer. Indeed, to such an extent were the nomads affected by the legislation in some areas by 1936 that:

...Inspectors of poor, and others are repeatedly appealed to by distressed tinker parents, almost at their wit's end, unable, on the one hand, to get houses or permission to camp and, on the other, dreading the consequences of failing to send their children to school...<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> "Plan to Improve the Lot of Vagrants. Compulsory Detention of Habitual Wanderers" in *The Scotsman*, 26 June 1936.

<sup>194</sup> *Report of the Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland*, (1918), para. 90.



As was the case with the enquiry on the Tinkers in 1917-18, the Departmental Committee on Vagrancy in Scotland was assimilationist in its approach to the nomads. The Committee remained optimistic that legislation could encourage the nomads to settle and it was recommended that local authorities should be induced to provide alternative housing for those travellers whose houses or camps were demolished through clearance orders under the new legislation. For those nomads who remained on the roads it was proposed that a system of central registration be introduced. The Committee also recommended increasing school attendance for children, and a scheme to provide them with sedentary employment on leaving school. By way of justifying its assimilationist recommendations, the Committee took it upon itself to examine the racial fitness of the Tinkers and vagrants. At the end of its investigation, it reported that a process of degeneration was underway:

The barriers between Tinkers and vagrants are breaking down. Young tinker men are tending to leave the parents camp and take to the road singly. They consort with other way-faring men and become merged into the tramp category. They may mate with women tramps, to a great extent losing many of their tinker traits, and drift into the ranks of those frequenting the lower class of lodging houses, or even onto town slums.<sup>195</sup>

This trend was reported to signify a worsening of the condition of the Tinkers. The argument followed that the Tinkers, once a distinct and honourable class, had declined. This process, it was believed, had been marked by a dying-out of their hereditary occupations such as making tin-ware. It was argued that where peddling was still practised by Tinkers, it was often merely an excuse for begging.<sup>196</sup> Such arguments were employed in the report to justify its

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<sup>195</sup> *Report of the Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland*, (1918), para. 590.

<sup>196</sup> *Report of the Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland*, (1918), para. 591.

recommendations that ‘...efforts should be made gradually to absorb tinkers into ordinary society’.<sup>197</sup>

As was the case with the Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland, no action was taken on the Report of the Departmental Committee on Vagrancy in Scotland. The Scottish Office considered the proposals, which touched upon the areas of housing, education, employment and health both unnecessarily complicated and over-ambitious. Furthermore, as was the case with the 1917-18 Committee, the recommendations met with great opposition from local authorities. Although there had been an attempt by one local authority in the North of Scotland to make sub-standard housing available for the Tinkers while their children attended school during the winter, on the whole local authorities continued to resent pressure to implement such schemes.<sup>198</sup> In such circumstances the increased powers of the local authorities to remove encampments continued to frustrate the lives of the travelling community throughout the 1930s. However, even with the new controls in force, there continued to be complaints about the difficulties of preventing Gypsies from camping.<sup>199</sup> And, in Scotland in 1937 there were calls for the introduction of a bold housing policy to settle the nomads on a permanent basis.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> *Report of the Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland*, (1918), para. 594.

<sup>198</sup> Department of Health for Scotland memo., Oct 1953. NAS: HH 61/80.

<sup>199</sup> T. Scott, “The Moveable Dwelling. Is it Adequately Controlled?” in *Journal of the Royal Sanitary Institute*, Vol. LXVI, No 1, Jan 1946. pp. 1-5.

<sup>200</sup> “Vagrancy” in *Organised Help*, City of Glasgow Society of Social Service, NS, Vol. 2, No 10, Feb 1937. pp. 148-149.

Despite a preference by government for dealing with Gypsies under broader legislation, a number of local authorities continued to campaign for private legislation to increase their powers to remove the Gypsies still further. It would seem that often such applications were representative of a reflex reaction to a public outcry over a particular incident involving Gypsies or a feeling that there had suddenly been an alarming increase in their presence. Often once investigated by a Police and Sanitary Committee, it would be found that the local authority had not used its existing powers and that there was little evidence of a real or long-term problem. As a result the application would be rejected.<sup>201</sup> However, a number of pieces of private legislation, which contained clauses dealing with encampments, were passed during the 1930s. The 1931 County Council Bill for Surrey contained comprehensive measures for the regulation and control of camping. There were complaints about the proposed bill from a number of parties. Indeed, the Showman's Guild complained that some aspects of the legislation were a 'revival of the old Moveable Dwellings Bill'.<sup>202</sup> However, the Bill was accepted eventually by the Government owing to the inclusion of an exemption clause for campsites and campers affiliated to recognised organisations. The Showman's Guild likewise gained exemption.<sup>203</sup> Further attempts to increase regulation can be traced in other counties. The Essex County Council Act, for example, was passed in 1933 and gave the courts the power to order the removal of caravans from any spot irrespective of their distance from highways or houses. Furthermore, the Act enabled the courts to prevent caravans being placed within specified areas where it was

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<sup>201</sup> See for example the East Ham Corporation Bill, (1903), the Acton Improvement Bill, (1904). Both Bills were rejected by Police and Sanitary Committee due to insufficient evidence of a nuisance and the failure of the local authorities to exercise their existing powers to prevent such nuisances as may have occurred.

<sup>202</sup> Murphy, *History of the Showman's Guild*, p. 174.

<sup>203</sup> Murphy, *History of the Showman's Guild*, p. 174.

judged that they would be a nuisance to residents, visitors or result in noisy or indecent conduct and in 1934 the local authorities used the Act to remove a large encampment at Chingford which had been a popular site for nomads for many years.<sup>204</sup> Other local authorities followed suit and in 1933 the Central Committee on Camping Legislation reported that, of 52 private bills deposited by Local Authorities, Borough and City Corporations, County Councils and Urban and Rural District Councils, 19 contained clauses relating to the use of land for camping and moveable dwellings.<sup>205</sup> Even the County Council of Middlesex, which had gained extensive provisions for dealing with Gypsies in 1906, campaigned for the extension of the Middlesex (General Powers) Act during the 1920s and 1930s, claiming it had insufficient powers to remove the Gypsies from the area.<sup>206</sup> Thus it would appear the Government's preference for dealing with nomadic groups under broader legislation concerned with health, housing and town planning, was not to the taste of many local authorities. They wanted tougher controls even though in the late 1930s it was reported within the Ministry of Housing that:

The body of powers, statutory and byelaw, is comprehensive enough to cover the whole regulation of these camps and of the various units in them, but local authorities appear to experience difficulty in selecting and using often concurrently, the appropriate remedies for dealing with different aspects of the problem and different classes of structure. Further, by leaving matters too long, authorities lose some of their remedies.<sup>207</sup>

There was pressure on the Government to pacify the cries of those who called for increased regulation for encampments and moveable dwellings and for new powers to move Gypsies

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<sup>204</sup> "Chingford Gypsies to Go. First Case Under New Act" in *Waltham's Town Guardian*, 11 Jan 1934.

<sup>205</sup> Report of the Central Committee on Camping Legislation, PRO: HLG 58/24.

<sup>206</sup> Meeting of County Council of Middlesex, 27 Nov 1930. PRO: HO45/115016/20.

<sup>207</sup> Memo. on Encampments of Caravans and Similar Dwellings PRO: HLG 52/404.

out of areas. However, there was also a recognition within government that the way in which the powers were used at the local level was to move the nomads on and break up the encampments rather than improve facilities and conditions on the camps. Thus the fact that legislation was introduced piecemeal and was often complex was useful to the Government insofar as it wished to placate calls for reform without creating a situation in which the nomads could be prevented from setting up camp throughout the whole country. Yet there can be little doubt that in many areas the legislation of the 1920s and 30s did make the nomadic life almost impossible. To cite one example, within eight years of Hurtwood Common being brought under the Law of Property Act it was reported that a number of the nomads, who had settled permanently on the site due to reluctance to travel at the risk of losing their permits, had been induced to settle in houses.

The focus of this chapter has been on the major reports and examples of national legislation that were put in to force in response to nomadic groups in Britain during the early twentieth century. A small number of pieces of local or private legislation have also been considered. However, these local acts and bills have merely been drawn upon as examples of the types of powers which many local authorities called for. There were many further instances in which local authorities applied to Parliament in private bills for special powers of dealing with Gypsies.<sup>208</sup> Such bills dealing with the use of common land, for example, could also have an effect on the Gypsy population in particular localities.<sup>209</sup> However, a full examination of the nature and extent of such powers at the local level would require an

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<sup>208</sup> See for example the East Ham Corporation Bill, (1903), the Acton Improvement Bill, (1904) etc.

<sup>209</sup> See for example the by-laws made under the Epsom and Walton Downs Regulation Act, (1936).

extensive survey far beyond the scope of this present investigation.

## Chapter Four

### Local Responses to Gypsies



(7. Hungarian Gypsy Coppersmiths being escorted by two policemen c. 1911)

In 1907 Dora Yates of the Gypsy Lore Society wrote that:

Public opinion has changed, and the Romani wanderers are now regarded with indulgent toleration; the barriers of prejudice that existed on both sides are being broken down...<sup>1</sup>

It is evident that, on occasions Gypsies not only felt that they were experiencing greater

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<sup>1</sup> D. Yates cited in B. Adams, J. Oakley, D. Morgan, D. Smith, *Gypsies and Government Policy in England*, Heinemann: London, 1975. p. 8. Adams et al, take a similar line of argument suggesting that as Gypsies travelled with wagons and earned their living by a variety of relatively inconspicuous occupations, it '...seems there was relatively little harassment'.

toleration but also that at times they received support from the non-Gypsy population.<sup>2</sup> Yet it is difficult to support the proposition that Gypsies suffered relatively little harassment during the early twentieth century. The government may have aspired to a policy of paternalistic guidance over a perceived backward people but, at the local level, where the Gypsies most frequently came into contact with officials in the form of police, councillors, and magistrates, there is evidence of a conflict between the aspirations of central government and strength of local opinion. It is in the treatment of Gypsies at the local level that the antipathy encountered by nomadic groups is most graphically illustrated.

In considering the relationship between the Gypsies and various authorities at the local level there is a problem of evidence. Examples of local populations pursuing the removal of Gypsies can be traced through the letters and minute books of local councils, newspapers and also in parliamentary petitions. Likewise, the prosecution and sentencing of Gypsies was recorded and reported widely in the press. On the other hand, whilst there can be little doubt that Gypsies frequently passed through the localities without attracting unwanted attention and even forged social and economic ties with the local population, such incidents were unlikely to have been written down. The absence of documentary evidence detailing instances in which the Gypsies were not considered a problem by sedentary society could result in an inaccurate impression that the relationship between the two groups was characterised wholly by friction. To an extent, this problem of evidence can be overcome by attempting to examine recurring patterns in the treatment of the Gypsies by sedentary

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<sup>2</sup> Accounts of instances in which nomads felt accepted by those among whom they moved can be found in B. Follows, "From Tent to Concrete Slab - Sixty Years of Travelling Life" in *Travellers Education*, June 1976. pp.



society. This approach continues to focus on points of contention between the two groups, but prevents individual instances in which unusually harsh treatment was meted out to the Gypsies from being taken out of context and over-emphasised. However, this methodological problem is perhaps less acute than might first appear. There is not a complete absence of evidence of sympathetic treatment of the Gypsies.<sup>3</sup> Yet, where such evidence can be found, on close examination the individuals concerned are frequently revealed to share the same ideas about the Gypsies as those who sought the group's removal.

A significant amount of the evidence, now under consideration has been taken from the county of Surrey, which by the early twentieth century had become an important centre for Gypsies in Britain. A number of convincing reasons have been put forward to explain the high population of Gypsies in the county.<sup>4</sup> The possibilities for employment on the land and at the races in Surrey no doubt provided an incentive, particularly at a time when the Gypsies were also pushed out of London by the actions of the Metropolitan Police and sanitary authorities. The large number of open spaces also made the county a convenient place in which the nomads could settle. Although there can be little doubt that estimates of the numbers of Gypsies in Surrey were often inflated by those who sought their removal, it would appear that during the early twentieth century their number, in relation to the size of the county, was higher than in most English counties. Thus whereas contact between members of the sedentary population and the Gypsies was often limited and confined to

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16-18. Elsewhere there are instances in which individuals or organisations gave support to individual nomads. See "Gipsies Stranded. Salvation Army to the Rescue" in *Hertfordshire Advertiser*, 6 Dec 1913.

<sup>3</sup> See above and below.

<sup>4</sup> See D. Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth Century Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. pp. 158-159.

isolated incidents, a significant body of evidence is available for Surrey. Other southern counties such as Essex and Hampshire also appear to offer noticeably more evidence on the contact between the Gypsies and local authorities than elsewhere in Britain.

### **Police, Magistrates and Gypsies**

During the first half of the twentieth century itinerancy and criminality were widely believed to be synonymous. It was often suggested that the crime rate in an area would rise sharply with the arrival of a band of Gypsies. It is impossible to determine whether any truth lay behind this allegation. Although there were many instances in which travellers were found guilty and even pleaded guilty to crimes, there can be little doubt that Gypsies also provided a convenient scapegoat for the criminal activities of others.<sup>5</sup> The Gypsy Lore Society employed a press agency to collect newspaper articles relating to Gypsies during this period and the collection includes numerous details on the arrest or prosecution of Gypsies for various offences from both local and national papers, which were used by the Society to compile statistics on the nature and extent of Gypsy crime (*Appendix Six*). However, it would be hazardous to rely too heavily on these cuttings to determine the prevalence of Gypsy crime. It is likely that some news articles would have been missed by the press agency. It is also possible that newspapers would report on the arrest of a Gypsy which would then be included in the Society's statistics when in fact the case was later dropped. However, the figures do reveal a clear pattern, in that the vast majority of Gypsy convictions

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<sup>5</sup> There is evidence of individuals who argued against the idea that Gypsies were a criminal group. For example in a letter to the Secretary of State 19 April 1910. M.L Sant argued that '...it is very seldom indeed that such

were for petty offences. Despite the trivial nature of many of the crimes of which the Gypsies were most commonly accused, the broad publicity surrounding the prosecution of a Gypsy even for a minor offence, gave force to rumours about the group's innate criminality.

It seems that members of the general public considered it a duty to act as police informants on the activities of the Gypsies. Hence the police, particularly in the southern counties, received numerous letters of complaint. Often reports would begin to arrive the moment a group arrived in the locality. In 1909 Captain M. L. Sant, Chief Constable of Surrey remarked that the majority of complaints in the county concerned simply the presence of the nomads and were not reports of criminal acts.<sup>6</sup> That fear was evident in 1937 the year when the Gypsies were first refused entry to the Epsom Downs during Derby week. The police complained at this time of being bombarded by telephone calls from members of the public anxious to report that there were Gypsies wandering around the villages.<sup>7</sup> Given the broad speculation about the criminal tendencies of wanderers, it creates little surprise that when a crime was committed in the vicinity of a Gypsy encampment, the finger of blame would automatically fall on the travellers. Chief Constable Sant remarked that when a case of chicken theft was reported:

The first thing the police do is go and search the gipsy encampment..'. although he added that '...I do not know of a case where they have ever succeeded in finding the fowls...'<sup>8</sup>

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persons are the subject of police prosecutions..'. but that they were occasionally summoned for minor offences. PRO: HO45/10995/158231/25.

<sup>6</sup> Letter from M. L. Sant to the Secretary of State, 19 April 1910, PRO: HO45/10995/158231/25. See also *Report from the Select Committee [HL] on the Moveable Dwellings Bill., Minutes of Evidence* of Captain M.L. Sant, Chief Constable of Surrey, (1909). para. 1303.

<sup>7</sup> "Ban on Gipsies at Epsom" in *The Observer*, 25 April 1937.

<sup>8</sup> *Report from the Select Committee [HL] on the Moveable Dwellings Bill., Minutes of Evidence* of Captain M.L. Sant, Chief Constable of Surrey, (1909). para. 1303.

Ideas about the Gypsies expressed by both the police and magistrates in such circumstances often drew upon age-old stereotypes of travelling people and no doubt served to fuel the fears and suspicions of the general public. For example, in denying reports that children had been going missing in the London area in 1919, a prominent Scotland Yard official drew on the stereotype of the Gypsy kidnapper. The officer stated that ‘...gipsies used to decoy little boys and girls, usually for the sake of their clothes..’ but ‘...we never hear of such a thing now, at least in the London district’.<sup>9</sup> Given such speculation, it can come as little surprise that when a Gypsy was accused of the abduction of a fifteen year old girl from a picturehouse later the same year, the case received broad publicity.<sup>10</sup> The story was carried by many of the national newspapers despite the fact that the judge believed both parties were responsible for the incident. Magistrates, too, were often inclined to form a negative opinion of Gypsies. In 1932, for example, one magistrate suggested that Gypsies did not appreciate the nature of the oath that they were required to take in court and, consequently, that their evidence was not necessarily trustworthy.<sup>11</sup> Shortly afterwards when an enquiry was made of Dora Yates whether it was possible to ascertain what degree of credibility to attach to the statement of a Gypsy, it is interesting, and a reflection of the Gypsy Lore Society’s thinking, that in her reply Yates said that the evidence of Tinkers, half-breeds and mumpers should certainly be treated with suspicion.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> “No More Stolen Babies: Police Emphatic on Denial of Missing Children Scare” in *Lloyd’s News*, 30 March 1919.

<sup>10</sup> “Abduction by a gipsy” in *The Times*, 5 Sept 1919.

<sup>11</sup> Lieutenant Crosland, Letter to D. Yates, 25 July 1932. GLS Correspondence Files: I-III, A-G.

<sup>12</sup> Lieutenant Crosland, Letter to D. Yates, 23 Sept 1932. GLS Correspondence Files: I-III, A-G.

The relationship between the agencies of law enforcement and the Gypsies was complex. The need to placate the agitated local ratepayer no doubt often coupled with personal feelings of antipathy towards nomads, frequently conflicted with the fact that it could be difficult to remove Gypsies without stretching the law to its breaking point. In such circumstances, the measures employed by the police in solution to the 'Gypsy problem' tended to be short term. One key policy was to prevent the nomads from camping or to move them on shortly after they had set up camp. This tactic was used to such an extent in some areas that in 1912 the School Attendance Officer for Dorking, Reigate and Godstone in Surrey, complained that:

The principal result of police action in this district is undoubtedly the constant migration of all van dwellers from place to place. They are not allowed to settle, and their stay in one place is usually so short as to make it impractical to secure the children's education at school.<sup>13</sup>

A further method employed by police was the threat of prosecution. The police frequently complained that it was difficult to prosecute Gypsies under the Highways Act and, similarly, the report of the 1906 Vagrancy Committee was critical of the courts for handing out lenient sentences for offences such as begging and sleeping out.<sup>14</sup> However, even in instances where a successful prosecution was unlikely, the police could use the law to frustrate the lives of the Gypsies and deter them from remaining in the locality. For example, in 1909 the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis claimed that the best way to discourage Gypsies from staying in an area was to impound their horses whenever they were left on the grass verge by the side of the road. This land was legally classed as part of the highway and

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<sup>13</sup> Report of Superintendents of School Attendance Officers on Section 118 of the Children Act 1908, 27 July 1912. PRO: HO 45/11052/173732/40.

<sup>14</sup> Sir W. Chance, *Vagrancy: Being a Review of the Report of the Departmental Committee on Vagrancy (1906), with answers to certain criticisms*, London: PS King and Son, 1906. p. 19.

therefore allowing horses to graze there constituted an obstruction. The Commissioner argued that prosecutions under the Highways Act often failed because some judges refused to recognise the grass as being a part of the road.<sup>15</sup> However, impounding the Gypsies' horses meant that they would have to pay both the fees of the greenyard in which the horse had been impounded and the fees chargeable under the 1890 Police Act. Such action, the Commissioner believed, caused sufficient problems for the Gypsies to ensure that they moved on quickly to another district and were unlikely to return.<sup>16</sup>

Where a particularly large number of Gypsies encamped in an area for a race meeting or country fair, police surveillance would be put in to operation. In one instance even after a group of Gypsies had been granted the permission of an Epsom landowner to camp on her private property during Derby week, a police watch was kept over the field.<sup>17</sup> At times such 'surveillance' merged into harassment and even the illegal treatment of the Gypsies. Such was the interest in removing a group of Gypsies from Llanelly in Wales in March 1912, that the police threatened the nomads with a drenching from the local fire brigade should they remain in the area.<sup>18</sup> So broadly reported was this threat, that when a further group of Gypsies arrived later the same month, one paper simply noted '...a big colony of gipsies

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<sup>15</sup> The prevailing view appears to have been that the grass by the side of the road did constitute part of the highway and that therefore camping on this land constituted an offence under the Highway Acts of 1835 and 1864. See "Highway" in *Justice of the Peace*, Vol LXXII, No 23, 20 June 1908, p. 299.

<sup>16</sup> Letter from Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis to the Secretary of State, 1 Jan 1909. PRO: HO 45/10995/158231/5.

<sup>17</sup> Lady Sybil Grant, "Caravans on Epsom Downs" Letter to *The Times*, 18 May 1938.

<sup>18</sup> The *Llanelly Mercury*, 7 March 1912 called for the Gypsies to be removed 'by steam-roller if necessary'.

arrived in the town on Tuesday, says a Llanelly paper. More hose practice for the fire brigade'.<sup>19</sup>

An extreme example of this treatment can be found in the case of the small bands of German Gypsies who travelled through Britain between 1904 and 1906.<sup>20</sup> Although they committed no crime in travelling on British roads, they were hounded from county to county by the police throughout their stay. On one occasion the Leicester police force who had intended to move the Gypsies out of Leicestershire ran into collision with the Warwickshire force who were determined that the Gypsies should not be allowed to enter their division.<sup>21</sup> In an attempt to prevent the Gypsies from entering Warwickshire, Superintendent Clarke of Rugby together with twenty-five sergeants and men of the Warwickshire police force drew up in a line with a vehicle blocking the road to prevent the Gypsies entering the county. In this instance the police themselves were acting outside the law, both by refusing to let the Gypsies enter Warwickshire and by obstructing the Highway. In the case of these German Gypsies, who travelled widely throughout Britain, a striking degree of uniformity in their treatment by different police divisions can be detected. For example, when the Gypsies were travelling through Loughborough it was reported that:

Four constables on cycles went on in advance of the procession, warning the shopkeepers along the route that 'the beggars were coming to town'.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> cited in "South Wales Post" 30 March 1912.

<sup>20</sup> See C. Holmes, "The German Gypsy Question in Britain 1904-06" in K. Lunn (ed.) *Hosts Immigrants and Minorities: Historical Responses to Newcomers in British Society*, Dawson: Folkstone, 1980. pp. 134-159.

<sup>21</sup> Letter from Chief Constable of Leicester to the Secretary of State, 10 Nov 1906. PRO: Ho 45/1031/124855/77.

<sup>22</sup> "Invasion of Loughborough" in *Leicester Daily Post*, 5 Nov 1906.

Similarly it was reported that the Gypsies were not permitted to enter shops in Leicester without a heavy police presence.<sup>23</sup> In such treatment the police appear to have had the full support of the local populations. In one instance when the German Gypsies were encamped at Thornton between Fleetwood and Blackpool in a field they had legally rented, it was reported that 200 men from the Alkali works accompanied by some policemen ‘...pulled down the canvas screens and dragged the vans into the road’.<sup>24</sup>

Elsewhere too, it would seem that the Gypsies’ heavy police escort were unable to protect their charges from the hostilities of local residents. Indeed, while the Gypsies were camping overnight in Ruddington, their camp was attacked, in the early hours, of the morning by a gang of twenty to thirty youths throwing ‘lighter crackers’. No police action appears to have been taken against the offenders, whom the local press described as ‘high spirited’ rather than criminal.<sup>25</sup> In one case it was reported that their encampment was visited by between eight and nine hundred local people during one weekend, and that ‘some of them displayed a hostile feeling towards the gipsies’.<sup>26</sup> On another occasion near London it was reported that ‘...stones were thrown by lads at the back of the crowd’.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, when a group of the German Gypsies were driven by the police from Perth to Balbeggie they were reported to have been followed by a crowd of some hundred people jeering and throwing

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<sup>23</sup> “On Treck. The German Gipsies return to Leicester” in *Leicester Daily Post*, 10 Nov 1906.

<sup>24</sup> T. H Crofton “Affairs of Egypt 1892-1906” in *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Series, April 1908, Vol. I. p. 380.

<sup>25</sup> “German Gipsies want to go to Loughborough Fair” in *Leicester Daily Post*, 8 Nov 1906.

<sup>26</sup> Report from St Albany Street Police Station, 9 July 1905. PRO: MEPO2/745.

<sup>27</sup> Report from Enfield Police Station, 18 Jan 1905. PRO: MEPO2/745.



stones.<sup>28</sup> However, the treatment of the German Gypsies was extreme and on the whole even foreign Gypsies did not receive such hostile attention from either the police or local residents. Even so, groups of alien Gypsies were generally regarded by the police as a threat and treated with great suspicion.<sup>29</sup> Hence, when a group of Hungarian Coppersmiths travelled through Britain between 1911 and 1913, they too were frequently seen accompanied by a heavy police presence (*Appendix Four*).

When a county council intended to campaign for some regulatory powers over the Gypsies then the police would perhaps be asked to complete a survey of the size of the Gypsy population and the extent to which they caused a problem for the local residents. For example in 1898 the Sussex police were asked to keep diaries detailing the whereabouts of Gypsy encampments, the names and numbers of the Gypsies (if these could be obtained) and any trouble caused by them or complaints made against them. The diaries were no doubt intended to aid in the campaigns for legislation against nomadism and were discontinued by the police forces at different times between 1915 and 1926. Out of 1200 individual entries, only 40 actually stated that a complaint was made about the Gypsies or that a crime was committed and even these incidents support the statistics of the Gypsy Lore Society that Gypsy crime tended to be trivial in nature.<sup>30</sup> A further example of close surveillance being carried out by police detectives on the activities of foreign nomads occurred in Cardiff in 1934 when detectives kept detailed records of the movements of a band of Greek Gypsies

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<sup>28</sup> Reported in *The Glasgow News*, 2 July 1906. See Crofton "Affairs of Egypt 1892-1906" p. 379.

<sup>29</sup> C. Emsley, *The English Police. A Political and Social History*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1991, p. 150.

<sup>30</sup> J. Keet-Black, *The Sussex Gypsy Diaries 1898-1926*, The Romany Traveller Family History Society, 1999.

throughout their stay in the area. The assumption was that the ‘...whole tribe are a very dangerous, cunning set of rogues and vagabonds’.<sup>31</sup> The police report emphasised the fact that some of the Gypsy women had been prosecuted for fortune-telling while one of the men had married a local girl who ‘...has been the associate of coloured men for many years’.<sup>32</sup> On occasion, it would appear that police surveillance did merge into the protection of the Gypsies from the unwanted attentions of local residents and the metropolitan police reported a number of instances in which they had had to prevent the German Gypsies from being roughly treated by the crowds.<sup>33</sup>

There were certain crimes across the country for which Gypsies were more likely to be prosecuted than the ordinary house dweller. For example, where Gypsy women were caught fortune telling for very small amounts of money, they would frequently be given several weeks’ imprisonment with or without hard labour. However, during the early twentieth century it was customary for non Gypsy fortune-tellers to place notices in magazines to advertise their services. No action seems to have been taken to prevent this practice despite complaints being made about it in parliament.<sup>34</sup> Whereas a Gypsy apprehended for fortune-telling could be prosecuted under the 1824 Vagrancy Act, a house-

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<sup>31</sup> Report of Cardiff City Police Detective Department on “Tenis and Tom Stevenson- Travelling Gypsies”, 23 March 1934. GLS Correspondence Files: III-V, H-O.

<sup>32</sup> Report of Cardiff City Police Detective Department on “Tenis and Tom Stevenson- Travelling Gypsies”, 23 March 1934. GLS Correspondence Files: III-V, H-O.

<sup>33</sup> Report from Enfield Police Station, 18 Jan 1905. PRO: MEPO2/745.

<sup>34</sup> During the first decade of the twentieth century there was considerable concern over the possibility of members of the lower orders and also people of more opulent circumstances falling prey to palmists. 9 April 1900 the Assistant Commissioner of Police, New Scotland Yard wrote to the Home Office voicing these concerns, PRO: HO144/541/A51669/33. 13 July 1900, General Russell (Cheltenham) inquired of the Secretary of State whether his attention had been called to the practice of advertising palmistry and fortune-telling in

dweller often could not, because although they were palmists, the judges decided they could not be described 'vagrants', a classification which was required under the Act.<sup>35</sup> This anomaly in the law meant that in court, the only Act under which house-dwelling fortune-tellers could be prosecuted was the Witchcraft Act of 1735. Such prosecutions against house-dwellers were not unheard of; one occurred in London in 1904.<sup>36</sup> However, when such prosecutions were brought they led to broad press coverage, and they were unlikely to be brought unless the individual concerned was a Gypsy or vagrant. Those found guilty, usually Gypsy women, often incurred only small fines but the hope was that such action would encourage them to leave the area.<sup>37</sup>

The courts appear to have been particularly harsh in their sentencing of the Gypsies in instances where money and goods were handed over for fortune-telling. For example, in one heavily-reported case which occurred in Colchester in 1912, two Gypsy women were sentenced to four and six months' hard labour for theft for obtaining a number of household items by deception. An examination of the details shows that in fact the Gypsies had entered a house with the permission of the maid and cook in order to tell their fortunes. The servants had thereafter handed to the Gypsies a number of items belonging to the lady of the house by way of payment. The servants managed to escape punishment arguing that they had believed

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magazines and newspapers. HO144/541/A51669/33. "Palmistry" in *The Truth*, 12 June 1890. PRO: HO144/541/A51669/3.

<sup>35</sup> Queries to *Justice of the Peace* suggest a great deal of confusion as to whether house-dwellers could be prosecuted for fortune telling under the Vagrancy Act. Although technically it would appear that house-dwellers could have been prosecuted under the Act it would appear that in practice police and courts were unwilling to prosecute. See "Vagrancy. Amateur Lady Palmist" in *Justice of the Peace*, Vol. LXXXI. No 26, 30 June 1917, p. 256.

<sup>36</sup> "Law Report: County of London Sessions" in *The Times*, 4 Oct 1904. PRO: HO 144/541/A51669/86.

<sup>37</sup> Letter from Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis to the Secretary of State, 1 Jan 1909. PRO: HO 45/10995/158231/5.

the Gypsies to be witches and handed over the goods out of fear.<sup>38</sup> This does not appear to have been an isolated incident and further examples of Gypsy fortune-tellers being sentenced to prison for obtaining money by deception can be found throughout the early twentieth century.<sup>39</sup>

Although it has been possible to detect a number of broad patterns in the treatment of the Gypsies by police and magistrates, these authorities were by no means always uniform in their approach. Indeed, a number of examples of divergence can be discerned in the attitudes taken by individual police constables to the Gypsies. For example, in 1934 the Chief Constable of Dumfries, William Black, complained that the Scottish Tinkers were idle, dishonest and insanitary.<sup>40</sup> However, the same year the Chief Constable of Angus, D. C. Christie told the Departmental Committee on Vagrancy in Scotland that it was rare that the Scottish Tinkers caused any trouble. He considered that they were a hard working people, and many of them were engaged in useful agricultural work.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, there is at least one example of a Chief Constable failing to act against the Gypsies despite pressure from both the County Council and local landowners. Captain M. L. Sant of Surrey refused to allow his men to remove the Gypsies on the grounds that they had committed no offence

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<sup>38</sup> See "Gipsy "Witches": Sentence on Two Thieves at Colchester" in *Morning Leader*, 30 March 1912. "Gipsies Fortune" in *South Wales Echo*, 30 March 1912. "Gipsies as Witches: Credulous Servants Terrified by Fortune Tellers" in *The Standard*, 30 March 1912. A further example of a Gypsy being accused of witchcraft in court by a woman who willingly handed over goods can be found in "Gipsy Magic". Amazing Story of Women's Credulity" in *Sheffield Independent*, 1 July 1919.

<sup>39</sup> See for example "More Fortune Telling. Gipsy Sent to Prison" in *Blackpool Gazette*, 29 Jan 1909. See also "Fortune Tellers Fined. Round-Up of Gipsies at Balckpool" in *Manchester Evening Chronicle*, 9 July 1918.

<sup>40</sup> Written Statement by W. Black, Chief Constable of Dumfries, to the 1934-36 *Departmental Committee on Vagrancy in Scotland*. NAS: HH61/84/26.

<sup>41</sup> Written Statement by D. C. Christie, Chief Constable of Angus, to the 1934-36 *Departmental Committee on Vagrancy in Scotland*. NAS: HH61/84/28.

other than camping on the grounds of the Lord of the Manor. Sant argued that the only person who could do so was an agent employed by the landowner.<sup>42</sup> However, even this surprising degree of toleration of the Gypsies from the Chief Constable of Surrey does not necessarily indicate a liberal attitude towards the nomads. It would seem that Sant was angered at the suggestion of Surrey landowner, Sir Reginald Justice Bray, that the police should be responsible for the removal of the Gypsies. The Chief Constable was concerned at this time that some rural police constables accused of neglecting their duty were using the excuse that they had been 'engaged in shifting Gypsies'.<sup>43</sup> Despite this stance, Sant clearly did believe that the Gypsies were likely to cause a breach of the peace, and, on one occasion allowed a number of his officers to accompany the employee of the Lord of the Manor in his action to move the Gypsies.<sup>44</sup>

The relationship between the police, the courts and the Gypsies was also subject to change throughout the early twentieth century. In fact, police suspicion of nomadic groups appears to have declined significantly with the onset of the First World War.<sup>45</sup> This shift in attitude may well be attributable to the inevitable change in police priorities after a large sector of the force had been drafted into the armed forces. Although some sections of the press hurled damning accusations at the Gypsies, claiming that their absenteeism and failure

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<sup>42</sup> Letter from M.L Sant to Secretary of State, 19 April 1910. PRO: HO 45/10995/158231/25.

<sup>43</sup> Letter from M.L Sant to Secretary of State, 19 April 1910. PRO: HO45/10995/158231/25.

<sup>44</sup> Letter from Sir R. Bray to M.L Sant, 24 March 1910. PRO: HO45/10995/158231/13. Letter from M.L., Sant to Sir R. Bray, 30 March 1910. PRO: HO45/10995/158231/9.

<sup>45</sup> Emsley, *The English Police*, p. 116. Robert J. Parr, director of the N.S.P.C.C also argued that Gypsies had been changed for the better by the war. PRO: HO45/11052/173732/51. see also R. Parr, "The Child of the Tramp. One Good Effect of the War" in *The Evening News*, 17 Feb 1916.

to enlist hindered the war effort, neither the police nor the Home Office appear to have shared this assumption.<sup>46</sup> There was a clear belief among both the police and Government that a significant drop had occurred in the crimes committed by vagrants and Gypsies during the war. The explanation was believed to lie in the fact that many Gypsy men had gone into the forces and of those left behind a large number had moved into housing after the passing of the Defence of the Realm Act.<sup>47</sup> The latter fact would almost certainly have made the Gypsies a less conspicuous presence to the police. After the war the relationship between the Gypsies and police appears to have reverted back to the pre-war pattern. However, in 1926 in an address to the Annual Meeting of the Chief Constables Association, Edward Waugh, solicitor and secretary to the East Sussex Joint Vagrancy Committee, stressed that many men of the roads were *bona-fide* working men.<sup>48</sup>

A certain degree of diversity in the treatment of Gypsies by police and magistrates was evident, therefore, during the early twentieth century. However, a number of common patterns in the treatment of the Gypsies by these authorities can be detected. There was for example a suspicion of the Gypsies among public and police alike, which was not linked to any evidence of wrongdoing. The police frequently responded to such concerns by employing the short-term method of moving the Gypsies out of the area through harassment, threat of prosecution and even illegal means.

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<sup>46</sup> See for example "A Gipsy Defaulter" in *Sussex Weekly News*, 20 Oct 1916. "Gipsy Mother. Fined for Concealing Army Absentee" in *Lancashire Post*, 27 Nov 1916.

<sup>47</sup> See "The Effects of the War on Crime" in *Justice of the Peace*, Vol. LXXX, No. 2, 18 March 1916. pp. 133-4. The author gives a number of explanations for declining crime rates during the war, in particular he argues that men of the classes most inclined towards criminal behaviour have been enlisted and restrictions on aliens have been introduced.

<sup>48</sup> Emsley, *The English Police*, p. 145.

### **Local Councils and the Fight for Regulatory Powers**

In many instances the first notice local authorities would have of a ‘Gypsy problem’ would be complaints from local residents. Sometimes these expressions would merely focus on the presence of Gypsies in a particular area and be unspecific as to the precise nature of the problem. More frequently, though, the concerns expressed to the county councils would include a list of grievances. Such complaints related to damage being done to land or property but often they were of a moral nature. For example, in 1910, 147 residents of Hurtwood in Surrey signed a petition calling for the protection of Hurtwood common against the Gypsies. Their demands related not to the protection of the common itself, but to the fact that:

The lawlessness practised by these vagrants with regard to the non-education of their children and filthiness and, if not criminality, of their mode of living, set a bad example to our villagers and their life amongst us has a degrading influence.<sup>49</sup>

The grievances of local residents against the travellers were often objections to a lifestyle that was perceived to be both criminal and immoral. However, though the public may have called for the abolition of itinerancy in theory, in practice those people living close to the encampments often feared that the Gypsies would forsake their nomadic traditions and settle more permanently into their neighbourhood.<sup>50</sup> On many occasions, when the Gypsies left as quickly as they had arrived, the complaints died down. In some areas, particularly where Gypsies engaged in work during the harvests or attended a traditional fair or race meeting, a

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<sup>49</sup> Petition for the Protection of Hurtwood Common, 6 Sept 1910. HO 45/10995/158231/16.

<sup>50</sup> “Gipsy Romance. Wealthy Nomads at Mitcham” in *The Standard*, 27 Nov 1911.

seasonal pattern can be detected in the letters of protest against the Gypsies received by local councils.<sup>51</sup> The Gypsies would leave and the problem would be dropped from the agenda of the council in favour of more pressing issues, only to return the following year.

On those occasions when the Gypsies attracted long-term attention and persistent protests were to be heard from local residents a number of options remained open to a local council. Like the police, they often pursued short term solutions and on occasions when the two authorities worked together in order to remove the Gypsies; the effects could hit the travellers hard. For example, in 1909 Blackpool Town Council managed to secure the expulsion of a large colony of Gypsies many of whom had lived in the town their whole lives and had been paying the council £20-£25 per season for their camping spaces on the sands.<sup>52</sup> Local tradesmen and residents had lobbied for years for the council to take action to remove the ‘sand rats’, as they called them.<sup>53</sup> Such figures claimed that the practice of fortune-telling by the Gypsies was a nuisance to the town’s summer visitors.<sup>54</sup> In fact, it would appear that visitors to Blackpool were willing to pay for the services of fortune-tellers, and the Gypsies featured on postcards of the town during this period. However, in the end, the police provided a justification for the eviction by bringing a number of prosecutions against the Gypsies for fortune-telling. The group were removed at one week’s notice. However, despite being

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<sup>51</sup> “Wandering Gypsies” in *Southern Echo*, 7 April 1908. The article talks about the ‘yearly problem’ of the Gypsies.

<sup>52</sup> C. Allen, *The Story of Blackpool*, London: Palatine Books, 1923. Gypsies are mentioned to have been camping in Blackpool as early as 1810.

<sup>53</sup> B. Turner and S. Palmer, *The Blackpool Story*, Blackpool: Blackpool Corporation, (1976) 3rd ed. 1976. pp. 55-56.

<sup>54</sup> See T. Thompson, “Affairs of Egypt” 1909, in *JGLS* Oct 1911, Vol. 4, pp. 113-135.



banned from camping in the area, many Gypsies continued to practice fortune telling on the sands and were not prevented from doing so, suggesting that it was the presence of their encampments which offended the residents, police and council rather than fortune-telling as such.

For a Council that hoped to remove Gypsies permanently, one method was to have them banned from their camping ground by means of a private parliamentary bill or by making by-laws under an existing act of parliament. This method was adopted by Middlesex County Council, which banned Gypsies from camping within 100 yards of any street or house by means of a private Bill in 1906.<sup>55</sup> Although the government became increasingly less inclined to ratify private legislation against Gypsies, it was still often possible to ban them from an area through by-laws made under an Act. Such an example can be found in 1937 when Gypsies were banned from camping on the Epsom Downs under by-laws made under the 1936 Epsom and Walton Downs Regulation Act.<sup>56</sup>

One of the most significant attempts to legislate against the Gypsies at the local level during the early twentieth century began in Surrey and developed into the national campaign for the passage of a Moveable Dwellings Bill. Residents of Surrey had long been of the opinion that the county had the largest Gypsy population in the whole of Britain and the 1911

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<sup>55</sup> County Council of Middlesex (General Powers) Act, 1906. Clause 31. In a memo to the Board of Education 28 June 1944, Sir George Jeffrey of the Home Office advised that proposals in by-laws to compel Gypsies to move on had been disallowed by the Home Office as they merely transferred the problem from one area to another. PRO: ED/11/234.

<sup>56</sup> Epsom and Walton Downs Regulation Act, 1936. [26 GEO. 5 and 1 EDW. 8.]

census would seem to support this claim. Indeed, it was felt by some that Surrey was ‘literally infested with Gipsies’ and the records of Surrey County Council reveal a catalogue of grievances against the nomads.<sup>57</sup> The agitation against the Gypsies in Surrey reached new heights in May 1906 when the Council received such a large volume of complaints from residents that the General Purposes Committee set up a special sub-committee to consider the question and it was resolved that ‘...the time has come for dealing definitely with the nomad classes’.<sup>58</sup>

It was believed unlikely that the Home Office would ratify by-laws aimed at keeping Gypsies off the commons and wasteland in Surrey, since the Government was keenly aware that permitting a local authority to ban Gypsies from certain areas would simply move the problem elsewhere. An attempt to introduce regulations to prevent Gypsies using the commons in Surrey had already been made in 1894 when the County Council placed a set of by-laws before the Secretary of State which would have banned Gypsies from camping on the commons or on unenclosed wasteland within two hundred yards of any highway, street or house.<sup>59</sup> The by-laws were clearly aimed at increasing the power of local authorities to move the Gypsies, who had previously been allowed to camp on any common unless they were moved on by the Lord of the Manor. However, the Secretary of State refused to ratify the by-laws since no evidence was submitted to indicate the existence of a Gypsy problem. Thus the

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<sup>57</sup> Sir Reginald Justice Bray quoted in “Gipsies in Surrey. Terror and a Nuisance, Say Sir R Bray” in *Surrey Evening Echo*, 8 Oct 1909. Also quoted in “Gypsy Invaders of Surrey. Mr Justice Bray on the Need for Registration” in *The Standard*, 9 Oct 1909.

<sup>58</sup> Extracts from the Reports and Minutes of Surrey County Council in Reference to Moveable Dwellings. SHC: cc 28/249a

<sup>59</sup> Extracts from the Reports and Minutes of Surrey County Council in Reference to Moveable Dwellings. SHC: cc 28/249a.

1906 sub-committee recommended that rather than pursuing by-laws preventing the Gypsies from camping, it would be useful to promote a bill regulating the moveable dwellings, similar to that promoted by George Smith (of Coalville) in the 1880s.<sup>60</sup>

The clerk of the council forwarded a copy of the report of the sub-committee to the county councils of England and Wales together with a covering letter inquiring as to the conditions prevailing in each county, in order to ascertain the extent to which such a bill would be supported.<sup>61</sup> In 1907 the General Purposes Committee of Surrey County Council reported that further legislation for dealing with the nomad classes appeared to be most desirable and the County Councils Association agreed that a bill should be drawn up. Surrey County Council hoped that the initiative would endow the police with far reaching powers to stop a moveable dwelling at any time, demand proof of its registration, and also that the children were attending school. It was hoped that the county council could license such dwellings and that such registration in a certain district could then be considered the settlement of the inhabitants. The registering authority would have the power to define the places within their district where the nomads would be allowed to settle, either permanently or temporarily and it would be an offence for the nomads to camp anywhere else or for private landowners to give them permission to do so. Any failure to comply with the Act would give the local authorities powers to remove any children of school age and have them placed in a workhouse or industrial school, in which case the parents would have been liable for costs. The proposals gave the police and the sanitary and highway authorities a duty to

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<sup>60</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on the Temporary Dwellings Bills with Proceedings and Evidence*, 11 Aug 1887. 279. ii.

<sup>61</sup> Circular on "Nomad Classes" from the Clerk of Surrey County Council, 3 Jan 1907. SHC: cc28/158.

cooperate with the registering authority and the Education Authority in each county in carrying out the Act's provisions.

It is easy to grasp the way in which such regulations could have been used against Gypsies on a day-to-day basis had they been instigated in the form championed by Surrey County Council. However, the Moveable Dwellings Bill was never passed. The regulations relating to Children were already being discussed under the Children's Bill and registration was judged by the House of Lords Select Committee to be impractical. What the campaign of the Surrey County Council illustrates, is the way in which suspicion of the Gypsies determined their treatment at the local level. The result of such a Bill being passed would have been to make the Gypsies more transparent. The authorities would be able to enter their dwellings at any time; these dwellings would be subject to rigorous sanitary legislation and the Gypsies would be responsible for reporting themselves to the authorities the moment they arrived in a locality. Furthermore, the authority would then have had the power to allocate a particular camping ground to the Gypsies as well as determining the length of their stay. In reality, the Bill could have been used as a means of moving on the Gypsies since it was unlikely that they would be granted any land for camping.

Surrey County Council was not alone in its hope to see more legislation introduced to regulate the lives of the Gypsies. Similar discussions were taking place in Essex during the same period.<sup>62</sup> Rochford Rural District Council drew up a set of by-laws similar to those

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<sup>62</sup> "Nuisance by Gipsies" Report with Correspondence, H. Gibson, Dep Clerk of Essex County Council, June 1904. SHC: cc28/158. Similar arguments concerning the need for regulation and in particular registration of moveable dwellings were frequently voiced during the early twentieth century. One example can be seen in

formulated in Surrey. The Council proposed to ban Gypsies from remaining in the district for more than twenty four hours without registration. Detailed regulations were also drawn up dealing with the condition, ventilation and storage of water on moveable dwellings while further provisions dealt with infectious diseases among the inhabitants. Penalties were to be harsh; £5 for the first offence and a further 40s for each day over which the offence continued after written notice had been received from the council. However, the Secretary of State once again refused to ratify the Rochford by-laws. Although the Essex County Council believed it was futile to take the matter any further it complained that:

The privilege of living in a free country means as regards Gypsies and other van-dwellers- unlimited trespass, no taxes, unfair competition with *bona fide* rate payers and woeful sanitary arrangements.<sup>63</sup>

Without regulation, it was claimed, ‘...the children grow up in ignorance and so perpetuate the nuisance which it is desired to abate’.<sup>64</sup>

The arguments advanced by both Surrey and Essex County Council contained an inherent contradiction. It was hoped by some advocates of the regulations that Gypsies could be made to settle by increased regulation of moveable dwellings or the enforcement of schooling for their children. However, in reality the provisions drawn up by the councils were aimed at giving them the authority to remove the Gypsies as quickly as possible. It is clear that the Moveable Dwellings Bill could have been interpreted so as to satisfy both

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Norfolk in 1911 when the Clerk of the Peace and County Council urged the registration of vans. PRO: HO45/10995/158231/17.

<sup>63</sup> “Nuisance by Gypsies” Report with Correspondence, Herbert W Gibson, Dep Clerk of Essex County Council, June 1904. SHC: cc28/158.

<sup>64</sup> “Nuisance by Gypsies” Report with Correspondence, Herbert W Gibson, Dep Clerk of Essex County Council, June, 1904. SHC: cc28/158.

arguments. In the short term, such legislation would have given the authorities far reaching powers to move the Gypsies and in the longer term it may have led to the settlement of Gypsies due to the constant problem of finding a legitimate resting place for their dwellings. What cannot be doubted, however, is that the sentiment behind the proposed legislation was repressive rather than paternalistic.

Surrey and Essex County Councils were not the only local authorities determined to do all within their power to secure the removal of Gypsies from their areas. Other local authorities used all means available to campaign for powers to remove the nomads. There was a particular distaste within the authorities for their obligation to spend any money on the Gypsies. In 1939 the Erith Borough Council, for example, complained about its obligation to provide air-raid shelters for the Gypsies encamped on the Belvedere Marshes, and there was even an attempt to use the debate over the provision of air-raid shelters to secure the removal of the encampment. It was claimed that:

...it seems to be rather hard line on the Borough to have to provide shelter for this nomadic population who pay no rates and spend most of the year touring the country. It would seem better to encourage them to go and settle in some less vulnerable area than Erith.<sup>65</sup>

It was claimed that the nomads were not 'housedwellers' within the proper meaning of the word, and were, ineligible for private shelter.<sup>66</sup> However, the Home Office recommended that the Borough provide sufficient shelter to accommodate fifty per cent of the inhabitants. The council eventually met these provisions although on later inspection it was found that the

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<sup>65</sup> Memo by Sir Clement Hindley, 25 Oct 1939. PRO: HO 207/603.

<sup>66</sup> Letter to J.H, Clayton, Borough Engineer and Surveyor, 20 Dec 1939. HO207/603.

shelters were wholly inadequate, having been made out of sub-standard materials. Thus, for the local authorities, the overwhelming concern was for the removal of the Gypsies. There was little inclination to improve the conditions on the encampments other than by driving the Gypsies away. This interest in removing the Gypsies became increasingly clear during the 1930s when legislation gave the local authorities new powers to move on the nomads.

### **Early Twentieth Century Housing Legislation: A New Weapon**

The courses of action open to the local authorities hoping to secure the removal of a permanent or semi-permanent Gypsy population from their locality increased significantly with the drives towards slum clearance during the early twentieth century.<sup>67</sup> The 1930 Housing Act and the subsequent Housing Acts of 1935 and 1936, along with the Public Health Act of 1936 in particular, placed new powers into the hands of local authorities.<sup>68</sup> The new legislation was aimed at improving the accommodation of the working classes and by no means directed exclusively at the accommodation of Gypsies. However, there is significant evidence to suggest that in many areas it was welcomed as a means to evict Gypsies both from permanent sites and temporary camping grounds. Indeed, in 1936 it was reported that the use of health and housing legislation in Scotland was causing tremendous problems for the nomads:

The consequence is that tinkers are being driven from place to place, even from county to county, and it is becoming increasingly difficult

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<sup>67</sup> J. Stevenson, *Social Conditions in Britain between the Wars*, Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1984, pp. 175-177.

<sup>68</sup> J. English, R. Madigan and P. Norman, *Slum, Clearance. The Social and Administrative Context in England and Wales*, London: Croom Helm, 1976. pp. 21.

for them to remain settled long enough for their children to put in the 200 school attendances required...<sup>69</sup>

This situation does not appear to have been unique to Scotland. There are also examples of the legislation of the 1930s being used to break up Gypsy encampments across Britain.

Those Gypsies who wished to buy or rent land on which to place their caravan had long encountered problems. There is evidence from the early twentieth century to suggest that where local residents or landowners suspected Gypsies of wanting to buy or rent land they would be prepared to buy it at a price well above its actual value.<sup>70</sup> However, during the 1930s the problems for Gypsies who wished to camp on their own land increased. Under Section 1 of the 1930 Housing Act and Section 41 of the 1936 Housing Act, clearance orders could be made where accommodation was judged to be 'unfit' regardless of who owned the land on which the dwelling place stood.<sup>71</sup> Thus Gypsies camped on permanent and semi-permanent sites could face eviction and in some instances the demolition of their homes even where they owned the land on which they were camped. In 1938, for example, the Ministry of Health confirmed a clearance order in Peterborough which led to the eviction of a colony of over one hundred Gypsies who had been renting pitches on the site for many years.<sup>72</sup> A similar situation arose in 1937 at Ash Vale in Surrey. The Rural District Council made a clearance order for sites known as the Bogs and the Quadrant which were being used by

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<sup>69</sup> *Report of the Committee on Vagrancy in Scotland*, (1936), para. 90.

<sup>70</sup> Letter from M.L. Sant to the Secretary of State, 19 April 1910. HO45/10995/158231/25.

<sup>71</sup> See for example "The Bogs and the Quadrant. Ministry's Inquiry into Clearance Order" in *Aldershot News and Farnborough Chronicle*, 23 July 1937. And "The Quadrant, Ash Vale Clearance Order, 1937" in *Aldershot News and Farnborough Chronicle*, 10 Dec 1937.

<sup>72</sup> See "This Caravan Colony May Have to Move On. Council says it will Build Houses Instead" in *News Chronicle* 24 Nov 1938.



around 500 Gypsies, some of whom claimed to have been in residence there for as long as forty years.<sup>73</sup> Thus although many local authorities continued to campaign for increases in their powers to remove the Gypsies it would seem that the legislation of the 1930s significantly strengthened their arm in this respect.

The breaking-up of Gypsy encampments under the legislation of the 1930s was justified with references to negative stereotypes of the Gypsies. In the case of the Ash Vale encampment, complaints about the insanitary nature of the area had been numerous and poor hygiene and bad living conditions were claimed by many to be the chief reasons for the failure of many of the children from the camp to attend school. In a general statement Dr J. E. Haine of the Ministry of Health also blamed the sites for infectious disease which he argued ‘...tends to spread in Ash like in no other Parish’.<sup>74</sup> Thus in order to remove what was considered by the council to be a blot on the landscape, the removal of the caravans and the destruction of the permanent dwelling places were ordered. Even where an encampment had a water supply, toilets, and dustbins, it did not necessarily escape the accusation of being insanitary. In 1935 the Medical Officer of Health and Chief Sanitary Inspector of Paisley called for action to remove an encampment of thirty caravans despite the fact that each tenant had paid 2/6d rent for a pitch on the site which had water, as well as clean toilets in orderly condition and dustbins at regular intervals. It had also been shown that the incidence of

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<sup>73</sup> “The Bogs and the Quadrant: Ministries Inquiry into Clearance Order” in *Aldershot and Farnborough Chronicle*, July 23 1937.

<sup>74</sup> “The Bogs and the Quadrant: Ministries Inquiry into Clearance Order” in *Aldershot and Farnborough Chronicle*, July 23 1937.

infectious disease was lower on this site than elsewhere in the borough.<sup>75</sup> However, the existence of the camp was considered to be a danger to the health of its inhabitants and neighbours.

In theory, the local authorities had an obligation to re-house those people displaced by the legislation of the 1930s.<sup>76</sup> However, a number of problems arose with re-housing schemes, which often meant long delays not just for Gypsies but for all tenants displaced under the schemes. In the case of Gypsies, there were further problems which often meant that they were not re-housed. In the case of the Ash Vale and Peterborough encampments, those displaced were to be offered housing as an alternative. However, since many of the Gypsies were engaged in hawking and peddling this arrangement was unsatisfactory. Furthermore, no guarantee was made by the council that the rents on the replacement property would be affordable to people on low incomes.<sup>77</sup> In the case of the Peterborough encampment, there were even complaints from Old Fretton Urban District Council over the unfairness of having to pay for the re-housing of the nomads whom they considered ‘...do not belong to our district’ and had ‘...not been admitted to the voter’s list’.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Departmental Committee on Vagrancy in Scotland, 1934-36. Notes on visit to Caravan Site at Paisley. 19 March 1935. NAS: HH61/103.

<sup>76</sup> Stevenson, *British Society 1914-45*, p. 177.

<sup>77</sup> “The Bogs and the Quadrant: Ministries Inquiry into Clearance Order” in *Aldershot and Farnborough Chronicle*, July 23 1937.

<sup>78</sup> E. Molyneux, Chairman of Old Fretton Urban District Council cited in “This Caravan Colony May Have to Move On. Council says it will Build Houses Instead” in *News Chronicle*, 24 Nov 1938.

Further evidence of Gypsies being forced to abandon their encampment without automatically being offered an affordable alternative, can be found in the late 1930s.<sup>79</sup> One such case was the Belvedere Marshes, an encampment which councillors had wanted to remove for years.<sup>80</sup> The local council, controlled by the Erith Ratepayers' Association approved a recommendation to acquire the plots by Compulsory Purchase Order and clear off the caravans. The Minister of Health, Sir Kingsley Wood, visited the district in July 1937 and tried to persuade councillors of the problems of displacing the Gypsies in this way. The camp was broken up eventually by a Compulsory Purchase Order in the early 1940s, but the re-housing of the nomads was paralysed by objections from local residents about the Belvedere Marsh dwellers being relocated in the neighbourhood.

The minutes of local council meetings which discussed the removal of Gypsies under the Acts of the 1930s reveal a great deal about attitudes to Gypsies at the local level. Surprisingly perhaps, the somewhat predictable negative images of Gypsies do not reveal the whole picture of local councils' responses. Often even the most ardent critics of the Gypsies within a county council would at times express a sympathy with the true romantic Gypsy who had once roamed the countryside.<sup>81</sup> However, the idea that there existed a few 'true Gypsies' who should be left in peace rarely amounted to more than a means to justify or

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<sup>79</sup> A further example of the failure of a council to re-house was noted by Norman Dodds who was to become involved in campaigning for the Gypsies as an MP in the 1940s and 1950s. Dodds was appealed to by a Gypsy woman who asked for help after being displaced by a Compulsory Purchase Order from the land which her family had owned and lived on for twenty years. The woman claimed to have been hounded from pillar to post ever since, as she did not wish to live in a house but was prepared to pay a substantial amount of rent for a plot of land on which to place her caravan.

<sup>80</sup> N. Dodds, *Gypsies, Didikois and other Travellers*, London: Johnson Publications, 1966. p. 43.

<sup>81</sup> "Here and There: Gypsies in Surrey" in *The Surrey Leader*, 15 May 1909.

excuse a repressive policy. It would be argued that it was important to determine the genuine Gypsies from the many families of dirty squatters who merely pretended to be Gypsies.<sup>82</sup> Where Gypsies were considered to be a problem, they would be proclaimed inevitably to be of the latter type.

### **Private Landowners and the ‘Gypsy Nuisance’**

Surrey appears to have been unique in that it witnessed the formation of a residents’ association specifically aimed at removing the Gypsies by a number of influential landowners. The Surrey Anti-Vagrancy Association was formed in 1909 largely at the instigation of Sir Reginald Justice Bray.<sup>83</sup> The force behind the movement came from local landowners who, like Bray, had been pestered for many years about the presence of Gypsies on the common land owned by the manors and the nuisance which, allegedly, they caused to local residents. Tired of pressure from local people to do something about the nomads, on 30 January in a letter addressed to the press, Lord Onslow declared that he and the other landowners were willing to delegate their powers to any authority which was willing to remove the Gypsies from the common lands. There was some opposition to this suggestion from certain quarters of the press and the *Liverpool Courier*, for example, appealed against this harassment of the Gypsies.<sup>84</sup> Similarly, the Chaplain of the Showman’s Guild was anxious to point out to both the landowners and the public that the showmen were following an ancient calling and should not be confused with the Gypsies who were, he admitted,

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<sup>82</sup> Anon, Letter to *The Times*, 19 April 1923.

<sup>83</sup> “The Surrey Anti-Vagrancy and Prevention of Heath Fires Association” SHC: G85/29/8.

<sup>84</sup> See T. Thompson, “Affairs of Egypt 1909”, in *JGLS*, Oct 1911, Vol. 4, pp. 113-135

‘...degenerate and ill-conditioned’.<sup>85</sup> The Gypsy Lore Society was less concerned and in an article for *Country Life* magazine Macfie argued that such measures would cause problems only for ‘mumpers and half-breeds’.<sup>86</sup>

The Association aimed to prevent the camping of all nomads in the districts inhabited by members. The decision to form the Association was taken in February and in a further meeting on 28 April it was resolved to appoint patrols to turn vagrants off the land occupied by members of the group.<sup>87</sup> The landowners quickly became frustrated by their failure to enlist the help of the Surrey police in their aims and focused their attention on the Moveable Dwellings Bill and the Children’s Bill as vehicles for their aspirations. They used their influence to gain a great deal of media attention for their cause and at first secured considerable sympathy.<sup>88</sup> As a result, when Bray gave evidence at the House of Lords Select Committee on Moveable Dwellings his view that ‘...most of the gipsies live dishonest lives...’ was widely reported.<sup>89</sup>

As it became apparent that the Moveable Dwellings Bill would not be passed, Bray pestered the council to pursue a private Bill for the area of Surrey claiming that the inaction of Chief Constable Captain Sant was leading to Surrey becoming a haven for Gypsies from

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<sup>85</sup> See Thompson, “Affairs of Egypt 1909”, pp. 113-135.

<sup>86</sup> R. A. S. Macfie quoted in *Country Life*, 15 Feb 1909 cited in Thompson, “Affairs of Egypt 1909”, pp. 113-135.

<sup>87</sup> The Aims of the Surrey Anti-Vagrancy Association, SHC: G 85/29/8.

<sup>88</sup> Letter from Lord Onslow to Justice Bray, 30 Nov 1909. SHC: G 85/29/8.

<sup>89</sup> “Mr. Justice Bray on Gipsies” in *The Daily Telegraph*, 9 Oct 1909.

all over the country.<sup>90</sup> He argued that ‘...the real Gipsies would welcome the provision’ contained in such a Bill.<sup>91</sup> However, by the end of 1909, the press began to turn against the Association. By this time its scope had been widened and the title changed to ‘The Surrey Anti-Vagrants and Prevention of Heath Fires Association’. The suggestion that vagrancy and heath fires were somehow closely connected, caused protest. Sir Charles Dilke who had previously been named in the press as a member of the Association wrote to the *Morning Post* pointing out that he had never replied to the original circular issued.<sup>92</sup> The press withdrew support and little was heard of the Association after June 1909.

A second group of landowners who frequently came into contact with the Gypsies were farmers, particularly in the southern counties where Gypsies often obtained work during the harvests.<sup>93</sup> During the early years of the twentieth century it would seem that, as with the seasonal hop-pickers who arrived in the country from the east-end of London, farmers welcomed the Gypsies as a necessary evil. Many farmers were grateful for such cheap labour of the Gypsies during the summer months but unwilling to provide them with a camping ground during the wintertime.<sup>94</sup> There was undoubtedly a degree of suspicion of Gypsies amongst farmers and in 1909, Dr. Henry Morris Chester, County Councilor of Surrey, claimed to have received many complaints about their poaching, and stealing milk from

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<sup>90</sup> Letter from Bray to Mr Chapman, Surrey County Council, 1912? SHC: cc 28/249a (c).

<sup>91</sup> Letter from Bray to Mr Chapman, Surrey County Council, 1912? SHC: cc 28/249a (c).

<sup>92</sup> See Thompson, “Affairs of Egypt 1909”, pp. 113-135.

<sup>93</sup> M. Lewis (ed) *Old Days in the Kent Hop Gardens*, Tonbridge: Tonbridge Free Press, 1962. see also Michael J. Winstanley, *Life in Kent at the Turn of the Century*, Folkestone: Wm Dawson and Son, 1978.

<sup>94</sup> Letter from M.L Sant to Secretary of State, 19 April 1910. PRO: HO 45/10995/158231/25.

cows.<sup>95</sup> Although Chester admitted that no Gypsy had ever been caught for the latter crime, he argued that complaints about it always seemed to arise when Gypsies were in the area. Farmers voiced further grievances against the Gypsies on the grounds of their alleged untidiness, their tendency to damage hedges, as well as the quarrels and petty pilfering which they associated with the group.<sup>96</sup> Such suspicions among farmers appears to have increased during the early twentieth century. However, with a telling choice of words a Home Office memo concluded that:

They cannot be exterminated and if they disappear their loss would be felt as they provide a reservoir of labour from which farmers and others are glad to draw.<sup>97</sup>

Even so, many farmers came to believe that the introduction of a registration system for Gypsies would be desirable, and when in 1922 G. H James, president of the Executive Committee of the East Sussex Farmers' Union urged the introduction of registration he clearly had widespread support.<sup>98</sup>

It would seem that by the late 1930s and early 1940s the tide of opinion had further turned against the Gypsies. During the early 1940s the National Farmers Union, which had held its first meeting in 1908, became increasingly concerned about the damage allegedly done to farms by Gypsies and resolved that the practice of letting land to Gypsies should be discouraged. Furthermore, local branches were urged to keep detailed records of any such

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<sup>95</sup> *Report of the Select Committee [HL] on the Moveable Dwellings Bill., Minutes of Evidence* of Dr Henry Morris Chester, County Councillor for the Parish of Seale, Surrey, (1909). para. 840.

<sup>96</sup> Home Office Memo PRO: HO45/25001/698267/54.

<sup>97</sup> Home Office Memo PRO: HO45/25001/698267/54.

<sup>98</sup> "East Sussex Farm Topics. More about the Gipsy Problem" in *Sussex Daily News*, 29 May 1922.

damage.<sup>99</sup> There were, however, exceptions to this general trend. For example, in 1936 a witness told the Committee on Vagrancy in Scotland that the ‘...tinker is an asset to the farmer, and there are few farmers in this neighbourhood and the surrounding district who do not employ them at seasonal jobs’.<sup>100</sup> Despite the concern over nomads it would appear that they continued to be employed as seasonal labour throughout the early twentieth century.<sup>101</sup>

### **Gypsy Children and the Problem of Education**

The passing of the Children’s Act in 1908 created a new set of problems for the Gypsies. It will be recalled that, under Clause 118, a person found wandering with a child who was not attending school could be arrested without warrant while the child was sent to an industrial school. In the years following the Act, this clause became widely viewed as a means of securing the eviction of Gypsies. This interpretation seems perhaps surprising given that many of the Bill’s most ardent supporters had hoped that it would be a useful means through which to encourage the Gypsies to settle, at least for the winter months. However, in practice the Act was undoubtedly perceived as another means through which to remove the Gypsies. In November 1909 *The Sanitary Record and Journal of Sanitary and Municipal Engineering* advised Sanitary Inspectors of local councils that the Children’s Act could be a useful means to drive Gypsies away from certain areas. It was suggested that if a sanitary inspector wished to encourage the Gypsies to leave, then he should request that the local school attendance officer pay a visit to the camp to ascertain whether the Act was being

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<sup>99</sup> Minutes of National Union of Farmers Meeting, 15 April 1946. PRO: HO 45/25001/698267/13.

<sup>100</sup> *Report of the Committee on Vagrancy in Scotland Report*, (1936). para. 590.

<sup>101</sup> Lewis (ed) *Old Days in the Kent Hop Gardens*. See also M. Winstanley, *Life in Kent at the Turn of the Century*,



complied with and that this would usually result in ‘...a general “treck” on the following day’.<sup>102</sup> Clause 118 was not due to come into operation until March 1910 in order to allow the Gypsies time to hear of the provisions, yet it would seem that in some areas the prosecutions began almost immediately. For example, in November 1909 two Gypsies was prosecuted at Southmolton Police Court for failing to send their children to school.<sup>103</sup> A similar case of a Gypsy being prosecuted before Clause 118 came into force occurred at Ivybridge in August 1909 when Joe Roberts was ordered to send his child to school despite the fact that it was the middle of the school holidays.<sup>104</sup>

The reason for the discrepancy between the hopes of those who had supported the Bill and the way it was used at a local level, was related to the fact that while on a national level the settlement of the Gypsies, particularly if it could be gradual and voluntary, was regarded as the best solution to the ‘Gypsy problem’, local concerns were often more short term. The conflict between these hopes for the new legislation was increased further by the fact that in a number of areas the schools refused to admit Gypsy children.<sup>105</sup> The problem proved particularly acute in Surrey and in 1910 a sub-committee was appointed by the Surrey Education Committee to consider the attendance of Gypsy children. The Committee found that school managers in many areas were making it a policy not to admit Gypsy children since ‘...their physical and moral condition [rendered] them unfit to associate with other

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<sup>102</sup> “Gipsies and the Nuisances in Connection with them” in *The Sanitary Record and Journal of Sanitary and Municipal Engineering*, 29 Nov 1909.

<sup>103</sup> “Gipsy Children and School: Prosecutions at Southmolton” in *Western Daily Mercury*, 22 Nov 1909.

<sup>104</sup> Cited in Thompson, “Affairs of Egypt 1909” pp. 113-135.

<sup>105</sup> “Surrey. Education of Gipsy Children” in *School Government Chronicle*, 29 Oct 1910. “Surrey and Gipsy Children” in *Westminster Gazette*, 3 Nov 1910. “Problem of the Gipsy Child” in *Westminster Gazette*, 20 Oct 1910.

children'.<sup>106</sup> The schools also objected to the granting of exemptions to the children of travellers during certain times of year, since it was considered that this practice disrupted the organisation of classes. In many instances, however, the Committee found that the real opposition came from the parents of other children at the schools rather than from school managers and teachers. Parents frequently threatened to remove their children from the school because of their objection to the admission of '...children with a lower standard of cleanliness, manners and morals'.<sup>107</sup> Reflecting such fears the head teacher of one Surrey School issued a notice to Gypsies in the locality stating that:

Pending the decision of the County Education Authority the children of Travellers cannot be admitted to this school by order of the managers.<sup>108</sup>

In this instance the schoolmaster claimed to have been authorised to take this action by the Surrey Education Committee. The latter denied such allegations and insisted that it was taking every possible action in order to secure the education of the Gypsy children.<sup>109</sup> Whatever the truth of the matter, this incident highlights the friction between the aspirations of the Government to extend the education system to the Gypsies and the local antipathies which the group continued to face.

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<sup>106</sup> Surrey Education Committee, *Report on School Attendance of Gypsy Children*, PRO: HO 45/11052/173732/43.

<sup>107</sup> Surrey Education Committee, *Report on School Attendance of Gypsy Children*, PRO: HO 45/11052/173732/43.

<sup>108</sup> Report from Surrey Constabulary 20 March 1912. PRO: HO 45/11052/173732/40a.

<sup>109</sup> Surrey Education Committee, *Report on School Attendance of Gypsy Children*, PRO: HO 45/11052/173732/43.

Those who had looked to the Children's Act as a means of removing the Gypsies from the road soon began to express disappointment over the working of the Act. In 1912 a number of Surrey landowners who had previously been involved in the Surrey Anti-Vagrancy Association dispatched a memorial to the Secretary of State in regard to the failure of Clause 118 to secure the education of Gypsy children.<sup>110</sup> In reality it is likely that their concern was related to the fact that the Act had failed to force the Gypsies to settle in houses. The Home Secretary certainly believed this to be the case and suggested in a memo to the Board of Education: 'It is hard to resist the conclusion that it is the gipsy nuisance proper which really interests the memorialists, and that the education question is only dragged in to support it.'<sup>111</sup> However, it was acknowledged by the Home Office that problems did exist with the working of clause 118 owing to the unwillingness of schools to admit Gypsy children.<sup>112</sup>

In 1914 the Surrey and Hampshire Education Authorities made a deputation to the Board of Education on Gypsy Children.<sup>113</sup> The LEAs were anxious to dispel the idea that they were not doing their best to secure the education of Gypsy children. The chairman of the Surrey Authority argued that there were a small number of 'genuine gipsies' and that:

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<sup>110</sup> Letter Secretary of State to Sir H.E. Roscoe 24 Oct 1912. PRO: HO45/11052/17372/40a.

<sup>111</sup> Secretary of State memo to the Board of Education, 14 Oct 1912. PRO: HO 45/ 11052/17372/40a.

<sup>112</sup> Secretary of State memo to the Board of Education, 14 Oct 1912. PRO: HO 45/ 11052/17372/40a.

<sup>113</sup> Board of Education Letter to the Home Office on the education of Gypsy children in Surrey, 11 May 1914. PRO: HO 45/11052/173732/49

These are of a superior class, their children are clean, no objection is raised to their attendance at the village school. Some of them are making good progress.<sup>114</sup>

However, in terms which have now become familiar, he went on to stress that, ‘...the genuine gipsy...is comparatively rare’ and as regards the rest of the nomadic population, they were verminous, and their school attendance was so short that they could not possibly profit from it.<sup>115</sup> In many instances it would seem that the operation of Clause 118 was aggravated by the policies of many police and local authorities who moved the Gypsies on and prevented them from camping. In fact, the Hampshire Committee conceded that, in their locality, the main reason for the failure of Gypsies to send their children to school was the rule, instituted by the verderers who controlled the New Forest, which prevented Gypsies from camping in the same spot for more than forty-eight hours. Thus there was not only conflict between the government, who hoped to keep the Gypsies in school, and the school managers who hoped to keep them out, but there was also a contradiction between the educational requirements of the Gypsy children and the policy of moving them on.<sup>116</sup> However, despite acknowledging the last problem few members of the Committees were in favour of the provision of permanent council sites. The claim was that it would be impossible to provide such sites since ‘the genuine gipsy will not camp in the same place as the disreputable vagrant’.<sup>117</sup> Both authorities left the Board of Education convinced that, the only solution to the difficulties

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<sup>114</sup> Home Office Memo on the Deputation on the Education of Gypsy Children from Surrey and Hampshire Education Authorities to Board of Education, 8 April 1914. PRO: HO 45/11052/173732/48.

<sup>115</sup> Home Office Memo on the Deputation on the Education of Gypsy Children from Surrey and Hampshire Education Authorities to Board of Education, 8 April 1914. PRO: HO 45/11052/173732/48.

<sup>116</sup> Home Office Memo on the Deputation on the Education of Gypsy Children from Surrey and Hampshire Education Authorities to Board of Education, 8 April 1914. PRO: HO 45/11052/173732/48.

<sup>117</sup> Home Office Memo on the Deputation on the Education of Gypsy Children from Surrey and Hampshire Education Authorities to Board of Education, 8 April 1914. PRO: HO 45/11052/173732/48.

encountered in educating the nomadic children was a Moveable Dwellings Bill.<sup>118</sup> If such legislation were passed and all vans used as dwellings were registered, it was claimed that it would be possible to keep track of the nomads and ensure that the children attended school. However, the Home Office disagreed and pointed out that a Moveable Dwellings Bill was unlikely to pass through the House of Commons.<sup>119</sup> The Home Office did not elaborate on its view. However, it is likely that the problems which had been encountered between 1908 and 1910 in defining moveable dwellings, coupled with the fears expressed, within some circles, over the interference with civil liberties had led to this interpretation.

Throughout the 1920s and 30s there is evidence that school managers often continued with their refusal to admit Gypsy children and that the local populations still objected to their presence in the schools on the grounds that they were verminous.<sup>120</sup> In 1935, for example, J. Macpherson, Deputy Chief Constable for Perth and Kinross complained that:

It is not fair that children out of clean homes should have to sit in schools with those who live in ragged filthy bivouacs pitched in rubbish dumps and such like insanitary places.<sup>121</sup>

While it is quite probable that the Gypsy children, living an outdoor life, were often dirty, there is no evidence to suggest that they were filthier than the children of cottage-dwellers, many of whom were themselves impoverished. In fact, the Surrey Education Committee

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<sup>118</sup> Board of Education Letter to the Home Office, 11 May 1914. HO45/11052/17372/49.

<sup>119</sup> HO Minute, 15 July 1914. PRO: HO45/11052/17372/49.

<sup>120</sup> The Board of Education continued to experience difficulties in pressing Local Education Authorities to make provisions for the Gypsies throughout the 1930s. HO Memo PRO: Ho 45/11052/1732/56.

<sup>121</sup> Written Statement by J. Macpherson, Chief Constable of Perth and Kinross to the 1934-6 Departmental Committee on Vagrancy in Scotland, Feb 1935. NAS: HH61/84/61.

admitted that the Medical Officer's report had found that van-dwelling children were no more diseased and verminous than the corresponding class who lived a sedentary lifestyle and that objections raised against their admission to elementary school were usually on the grounds of the '...objectionable condition of their clothing, and of their language and morals'.<sup>122</sup> Similarly, the first Annual Report of the West Sussex Medical Inspection of Schools found that Gypsy children were clean and relatively well-kept.<sup>123</sup>

It is difficult to assess how many Gypsy children were committed to industrial schools under the 1908 Children's Act. It has not been possible to locate any government figures on this point. However, information was compiled for Scotland for inclusion in the 1934 Departmental Committee on Vagrancy in Scotland.<sup>124</sup>

<b>Year</b>	<b>No of Children sent to Industrial Schools under the Vagrancy Clause of the 1908 Children's Act</b>
1910-1918	297
1919-1926	29
1927-1933	81
	<b>Total 407</b>

(8. Table showing the numbers of vagrant children committed to industrial schools in Scotland under the 1908 Children's Act. Source: *Report of the Departmental Committee on Vagrancy in Scotland*. (1936), Appendix II.)

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<sup>122</sup> Letter from Surrey Education Committee to Lord Russell 19 Nov, 1910. HO 45/11052/17372/40.

<sup>123</sup> West Sussex Medical Inspection of Schools Annual Report 1910, WNAS: WDc/HE2/2/1. Also quoted in *Country Life*, 13 Aug 1910. See also "Surrey Admission of Gypsy Children" in *The Schoolmaster* 5 March 1910. "Gypsy Children and Schools" in *The Surrey Advertiser*, 7 May 1910.

<sup>124</sup> *Report of the Departmental Committee on Vagrancy in Scotland*. (1936), Appendix II.

It would appear that in Scotland the Act was used most zealously in the immediate years after it had become law. However, even then there were those who continued to complain that it did not go far enough.<sup>125</sup>

Although, the statistics from Scotland indicate that Children's Act was used as a means to commit the children of nomadic families to industrial schools it would seem that in many instances court orders to send children to industrial schools were not upheld. Often, even after the courts had ordered the committal of a nomadic child to an industrial school, the Local Education Authorities would refuse to pay for the education of the child. Such action was taken on the grounds that the children were wanderers rather than *bona fide* residents, and therefore could not be considered their responsibility.<sup>126</sup> The Treasury was similarly unwilling to pay for the committal of Gypsies to Industrial Schools.<sup>127</sup> Throughout the 1920s and 1930s the debate over who was to pay for the education of Gypsy children continued to rage within the County Councils Association and the Association of Municipal Corporations.<sup>128</sup> Both bodies informally complained to the Board of Education over the unfairness that the cost of educating the traveller children fell wholly upon the vigorous authorities while the inactive authorities paid nothing.<sup>129</sup> Although the unwillingness of the education authorities to commit themselves to pay for the cost of an industrial school education might appear to be a surprising reprieve for the Gypsy children, in 1909 the

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<sup>125</sup> *Report of the Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland*, (1918), para. 162.

<sup>126</sup> Letter from Surrey Education Committee to the Secretary of State 22 Nov 1909 PRO: HO 45/11052/17372/27.

<sup>127</sup> Letter from Secretary of State to Surrey Education Committee 1 Feb 1909. PRO: HO 45/11053/17372/27.

<sup>128</sup> Letter from T. S, Lamb of St Peter's Hospital, Bristol to Ministry of Health, PRO: MH 57/78.

<sup>129</sup> Ministry of Education Minute 27 May 1936, PRO: ED/11/234.

Scottish NSPCC voiced concerns that the failure to send Gypsy children to industrial schools when ordered by the courts led to their being sent to the workhouse after the prosecution of their guardian.<sup>130</sup> It would seem that in some instances this was indeed the case. For example when George Gladwin was prosecuted for failing to send his children to school at Horsham Police Court in 1912, the defendant said that he had no idea of the Act being in force and was willing to comply with it in future, if only he could find somewhere to camp. But his two children were committed to the workhouse.<sup>131</sup> The debate over the sending of Gypsies to industrial schools illustrates the inherent contradiction within the policies of the local authorities.<sup>132</sup> Despite their calls for a permanent solution to the ‘Gypsy problem’, the lack of willingness to spend money on a people whom they refused to recognise as legitimate residents led the authorities to pursue short term means to secure their removal.

There is little evidence on how the Gypsy children fared in school once they had been admitted. School text books inevitably reflected middle class opinion during the early twentieth century and no doubt served to alienate Gypsy children as they alienated a large sector of the working class who found it difficult to identify with illustrations of white collar workers and large children’s toys.<sup>133</sup> Yet there is further evidence of problems which were encountered more exclusively by Gypsy children. The first Annual Report of the West

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<sup>130</sup> Letter from NSPCC to Secretary of State, 17 Aug 1909. PRO: HO 45/11052/17372/22. It was already customary for children whose parents were convicted of an offence under the 1824 Vagrancy Act to be placed in workhouses, HO45/10361/154821/6.

<sup>131</sup> “Horsham Police Court” in *Sussex Daily News*, 30 March 1912.

<sup>132</sup> Industrial schools in early twentieth century Britain were predominantly geared towards the education of children who had either been found guilty of a minor criminal offence or were believed to be in danger of becoming criminals. J. Tobias *Crime and Industrial Society in the Nineteenth Century*, Oxford: Alden Press, 1967. p. 214.



Sussex Medical Inspection of Schools found that such children were often excluded from school within a short space of time as they were ‘not appreciated by their teachers owing to their deficient moral training’.<sup>134</sup> Teachers often complained that the children were both physically and mentally below the normal standard and in many areas this attitude resulted in placing Gypsy children as old as twelve along with ‘the “babies” class of five year olds’.<sup>135</sup> In the early 1940s Mr Stillmann of the Hampshire Education Authority considered the views of a number of headmasters in the county and reported to the Board of Education on the opinions held on Gypsy children.<sup>136</sup> Having considered the reports made to him by headmasters he claimed that the ‘...intelligence of the gipsy child is below that of the normal child’ and that they required extra supervision owing to their being extremely cunning.<sup>137</sup>

Such was the prevalence of the view that Gypsy children were mentally sub-normal that in 1923 Hugh Gordon, an Inspector of Schools in the Metropolitan area designed an investigation to examine the intelligence of Gypsy and canal boat children. Gordon hoped to be able to establish whether the mental deficiencies which teachers claimed to encounter in

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<sup>133</sup> P. Musgrave, *Society and Education in England Since 1800*, London: Methuen and Co, 1971 (First published in 1968). p. 79.

<sup>134</sup> West Sussex Medical Inspection of Schools Annual Report 1910, WNAS: WDc/HE2/2/1. Also quoted in *Country Life*, 13 Aug 1910. See also “Surrey Admission of Gipsy Children” in *The Schoolmaster* 5 March 1910. “Gipsy Children and Schools” in *The Surrey Advertiser*, 7 May 1910.

<sup>135</sup> Mr Patterson, Headmaster of the Central School, Perth quoted in Scottish Office. *Report of the Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland*, 1918. Par. 91. Further evidence of the belief that Gypsy children were educationally sub-normal can be found in the notes of Hampshire County Education Officer 14 July 1944. PRO: ED11/234.

<sup>136</sup> Note to County Education Officer on Hampshire Gypsies, 14 July 1944. PRO: ED11/234.

<sup>137</sup> Note to County Education Officer on Hampshire Gypsies, 14 July 1944. PRO: ED11/234.

such children could be attributed to heredity, environment or merely to lack of schooling.<sup>138</sup>

He examined the accounts of Gypsy children by a number of individuals including school teachers and medical inspectors such as Reginald Farrar of the Local Government Board who had given evidence to the 1910 Select Committee on Moveable Dwellings.<sup>139</sup> From this detail he painted a picture of Gypsy life which echoed that of the Moveable Dwellings Committee:

Gipsies mostly live in a decrepit assembly of caravans and “shacks”... There are as a rule no proper water supplies, or sanitary conveniences or drainage. In fact the children are absolutely unused to proper sanitation and cleanly habits and appear to be strangers to the usual conveniences.

The children are “dirty and insufficiently clothed”; they wear neither shoes nor stockings at home; they have good boots but they take them off outside the school premises.

There is little crime among the Gipsies and no real evidence of intimidation. The public do not carefully distinguish between the tramp and the Gipsy class. It is the tramp who commits crimes of violence, not the gipsy. But they (the gipsies) have rather primitive views as to the rights of property.<sup>140</sup>

Having obtained what he considered to be a ‘generally trustworthy’ picture of Gypsy life, Gordon set about his investigation. During the course of his study he subjected a group of 82 Gypsy children and a group of 76 canal boat children to a series of intelligence tests and compared the results he obtained to those of a group of mentally defective children who were

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<sup>138</sup> Board of Education Pamphlets, No. 44. H. Gordon, *Mental and Scholastic Tests Among Retarded Children, Physically Defective, Canal Boat and Gipsy Children and Backward Children in Ordinary Elementary Schools*. An Enquiry into the Effects of Schooling on the Various Tests, London : His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1923.

<sup>139</sup> *Select Committee [HL] on Moveable Dwellings., Minutes of Evidence*, of Reginald Farrar, Medical Inspector of the Local Government Board, para. 422.

<sup>140</sup> Gordon, *Mental and Scholastic Tests Among Retarded Children, Physically Defective, Canal Boat and Gipsy Children and Backward Children in Ordinary Elementary Schools*. p. 47-48.

receiving full-time education. The tests attempted to measure the reading speeds of the children and their skills in addition and subtraction.<sup>141</sup> It is clear that such tests were predominantly a measure of the amount of schooling that a child had received. However, they also included a number of questions designed to examine the moral character of the children and thus required them to conform to the standards of moral behaviour accepted by those who had drawn up the tests. An inability to recognise the behavioural pattern deemed appropriate by the examiner in a given situation would lead the children to obtain low marks on the tests. In one instance a child was asked the question: 'What is the thing to do if you have broken something which belongs to someone else?'<sup>142</sup> Such questions were intended to determine whether the children were mentally sub-normal.

Although Gordon remarked that the Gypsy children appeared 'sharp and alert' many did not do well. He concluded that the tests were unable to measure the children's native ability and succeeded only in revealing the extent of schooling they had received. In fact, he found that the children's ability to perform on the tests corresponded almost exactly to the number of attendances they had made at school. Thus the investigation moved away from differences on grounds of heredity. The study also avoided drawing distinctions between full and half-blooded Gypsies. However, having considered various accounts of the living conditions and habits of the Gypsies, Gordon argued that although heredity was unlikely to

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<sup>141</sup> The tests employed by Hugh Gordon were derived from L. Terman, *The measurement of intelligence. an explanation of and a complete guide for the use of the Stanford revision and extension of the Binet-Simon intelligence scale*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1916. And P. Ballard, *Mental Tests for School Use*, London Hodder and Stoughton, 1920.

<sup>142</sup> Gordon, *Mental and Scholastic Tests Among Retarded Children, Physically Defective, Canal Boat and Gipsy Children and Backward Children in Ordinary Elementary Schools*. p. 49.

be a factor in explaining their performance, the social environment in which they lived was perhaps as important as their school attendance. He urged further investigation to discover the extent to which the mental ability of the Gypsies was hindered by their home life and whether this environment gave them skills in any other direction.<sup>143</sup> Although no further enquiries appear to have been made, Gordon's investigation, published by the Board of Education, enabled those who complained about the presence of the Gypsy in schools to argue that a defective home life rendered them unfit to be educated alongside house-dwelling pupils.

In many schools it would appear that the assumptions of teachers left them convinced that the Gypsy children should be instructed separately from those of local residents. In 1914 it was found that in most schools around the New Forest, which had accepted Gypsy children, the nomads were seated at separate desks and set apart from the rest of the class.<sup>144</sup> Expressions of antipathy towards the Gypsies from sedentary pupils were also common. This state of affairs was evident in the 1918 report of the Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland. J. Macmaster Campbell, Sheriff-Substitute of Kintyre told the Committee that he had learned of a number of cases where Tinker children had been removed from school owing to the hostilities of other children.<sup>145</sup> Similarly, having inquired into the conditions for Tinker children who attended school, the 1936 Committee on Vagrancy in Scotland reported that:

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<sup>143</sup> Gordon, *Mental and Scholastic Tests Among Retarded Children, Physically Defective, Canal Boat and Gipsy Children and Backward Children in Ordinary Elementary Schools*, p. 60.

<sup>144</sup> HO Memo 8 April, 1914. PRO: HO45/11052/173732/48.

<sup>145</sup> *Report of the Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland*, (1918). Appendix V.

The conditions attending school are sometimes hard and unjust, and prejudice against the tinker and his off-spring dies hard. Children, it is to be feared, feel their position keenly.<sup>146</sup>

J. Macpherson, Deputy Chief Constable of Perth and Kinross, also reported that in his experience the Tinker children were made to feel like lepers and were sensitive enough to realise that they certainly unwanted, if not detested.<sup>147</sup>

There can be little doubt that children were aware of the preconceptions of their teachers and fellow pupils. So much is evident in the autobiography of Silvester Gordon Boswell which draws on experiences of prejudice from both teachers and pupils alike:

If the schoolmaster said “what standard were you in last school?” and we answered: “Standard Three!” it was “Put him in standard two, teacher they’re not here for long.”<sup>148</sup>

In the playground children gave voice to the assumptions of their teachers and Boswell recalls that ‘we were called *dunces*, and we had a fight first day and everyday alike’.<sup>149</sup> Similarly, the autobiography of Manfri Wood testifies to the awareness of Gypsy children of the opinions of their teachers. He recalled that: ‘The teachers humiliated us like a lot of monkeys in the zoo - just because we were Gypsies and a little different from the rest’.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> *Report of the Committee on Vagrancy in Scotland*, (1936). para. 592.

<sup>147</sup> Written Statement by J. Macpherson, Chief Constable of Perth and Kinross to the 1934-6 *Departmental Committee on Vagrancy in Scotland*, Feb 1935. NAS: HH61/84/61.

<sup>148</sup> S. Boswell, *The Book of Boswell: Autobiography of a Gypsy*, (ed) John Seymour, London: Victor Gollancz, 1970. p. 22.

<sup>149</sup> Boswell, *The Book of Boswell: Autobiography of a Gypsy*, p. 22.

<sup>150</sup> M. Wood, In *The Life of a Romany Gypsy*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973, p. 21.

Ideas about the separate education of Gypsy children were explored by Surrey Education Committee which opened Hurtwood School for Gypsy Children in 1926, with 40 pupils.<sup>151</sup> The idea of a school exclusively for Gypsy children was not new; it had been an instrument of evangelical missions among the Gypsies for many years. However, Hurtwood was an early secular attempt to introduce separate education for the children of travellers. It appears to have met with the approval of the press and it would also seem that without the opposition encountered in having their children admitted to sedentary schools, the Gypsies supported the provisions and were willing for their children to attend.<sup>152</sup> However, the problem of eviction which the Gypsies faced in their encampment led eventually to the school's closure in 1934 as a result of the dwindling numbers of children after the Hurtwood encampment had been broken up and the Gypsies relocated to corrugated iron bungalows in Walton.<sup>153</sup> In some quarters, the school's closure was hailed as a successful experiment in 'civilising' the Gypsies and encouraging them to forsake their nomadic traditions.<sup>154</sup> By the early 1940s, however, it was considered by Central Government to be both socially and educationally unsound to have separate schools for Gypsy children. Complaints were still heard about the presence of Gypsy children in village schools, particularly with regard to their cleanliness, but the Minister of Education recommended that, where necessary, these issues should be dealt with under Section 85 of the 1936 Public Health Act, which gave the Local Education Authorities the power to apply to a court of summary jurisdiction, to order

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<sup>151</sup> "Notes and Queries" in *JGLS* Vol. 13, No 4, 1934. pp. 217-229.

<sup>152</sup> "Gipsy School with no Truants" in *Daily Express*, cited in SHC: 2570/1.

<sup>153</sup> G. Salt, "England's School for Gipsy Children" in *Millgate Monthly*, April 1935.

<sup>154</sup> "Exit the Gipsy. Civilisation Extends its Conquering Sway" in *West Lancashire Evening Gazette* (Blackpool), 11 Dec 1933. see also "Surrey Gypsy School Closed" in *The Times Education Supplement*, 13 Jan 1934.

the removal of the child to a cleansing station where they could be cleansed compulsorily.<sup>155</sup> Whether any Gypsy children were dealt with in this way is unclear. However, evidence from a number of sources suggests that on the whole Gypsy children were no more dirty than those of house-dwellers.<sup>156</sup>

### **Pockets of Toleration**

It has been suggested that the interaction between the Gypsies and the local populations among whom they moved did not inevitably lead to friction.<sup>157</sup> Although there is plenty of evidence to support the view that whenever the Gypsy and the house dweller met there was conflict, in some instances it did not occur. One example of Gypsies feeling they were accepted by the wider community can be read in an account written by Bill Follows, a Gypsy born in 1914 who spent his childhood living on Bentley Common in Walsall:

On the common, the house people were all right to us, we were all as one...they used to come from Green Lane to drink with us...<sup>158</sup>

Such accounts are relatively rare since traditionally nomadic groups have placed a greater importance on oral than written culture. Yet the lack of documentation detailing such social interaction between the Gypsies and sedentary population should not be taken to imply that the association described in Follow's account was in any way unique. It would seem that in

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<sup>155</sup> Brief for Ministry of Education talk with Sir G. Jeffreys, 9 Nov 1944. PRO: ED/11/234.

<sup>156</sup> West Sussex Medical Inspection of Schools Annual Report 1910, WNAS: WDC/HE2/2/1. See also *Report of the Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland*, (1918), par. 64 which quotes the witness statement of the former General Secretary of the Scottish N.S.P.C.C Mr Ninian Hall who is opposed to the nomadic way of life but concedes that Gypsy children are better kept, dressed and nourished than is generally believed.

<sup>157</sup> See above.

<sup>158</sup> Follows, "From Tent to Concrete Slab- Sixty Years of Travelling Life" pp. 16-18.

some instances the close proximity with which people found themselves to Gypsies during the First World War, when many took to the towns, led to an increased understanding. Indeed, it would appear that the situation also led to the formation of trading relationships between nomads and local shopkeepers.<sup>159</sup> The fact that some newspapers acknowledged that the Gypsies had lost relatives and received medals for their action during the war in the same way as the sedentary population may also have improved relationships between the two groups in some areas.<sup>160</sup> With the end of the War it would seem that a number of popular newspapers incorporated the Gypsies into their tales of war time community spirit. However, such reports could often be intensely patronising, with a noticeable tendency to remark upon some improvement on the part of the Gypsies rather than on any increased understanding or interaction between them and the sedentary populations.<sup>161</sup>

Traditional fairs and race meetings were occasions when Gypsy and sedentary traditions and cultures entwined. Where Gypsies had been trading or fortune telling at a particular event for tens or even hundreds of years they could be welcomed as an integral part of the tradition without which the event could not be complete.<sup>162</sup> On such occasions the public and even the press could be extremely protective towards the rights of the Gypsies. For example, in 1937 when the Gypsies were banned from camping on the Epsom Downs during Derby week, many members of the public wrote to newspapers to support the

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<sup>159</sup> *Report of the Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland*, (1918), para. 132.

<sup>160</sup> "Gipsies Changed by the War. Now Churchgoers and of Cleaner Habits" in *The Star*, 16 Aug 1920.

<sup>161</sup> "Gipsies Changed by the War. Now Churchgoers and of Cleaner Habits" in *The Star*, 16 Aug 1920.

<sup>162</sup> "Derby without Gipsies" in *News of the World*, 7 Feb 1937. "Gipsies on Epsom Downs" in *Sussex Daily News*, 18 Feb 1937. "Romany Rye" in *Manchester Evening News*, 15 April 1937.



campaign of local landowner Lady Sybil Grant to have them reinstated to their former camping grounds, at least for the duration of the Derby.<sup>163</sup> In this instance the plight of the Gypsies became caught up in a political wrangle relating to the abolition of rights of access for the public to common land. Even many residents from the Surrey area seemed to believe that the Gypsies should be allowed to camp on the Downs at least for the duration of the Derby meeting. It is interesting that the Gypsies should have received such overwhelming public support over the Epsom Derby. The arguments in their favour tended to focus on the colour their presence added and the importance of the tradition of fortune telling against the background of a Gypsy caravan.

However, even supporters of the Gypsies often expressed ideas similar to those of their opponents. The former often held dear to a romantic perception of the true Gypsy, while they attributed the negative stereotype to the tramps or half-Gypsies with whom they had no sympathy at all. For example, when Lady Sybil Grant opened up her land to some of the Gypsies banned from the Epsom Downs during Derby week, she was clear to stress that:

None but genuine Gypsies are being admitted, and bearers of all the most familiar Romany surnames are among the company.<sup>164</sup>

The argument, once again, was that the ‘true’ Romany Gypsies were ‘...only a broken and scattered remnant of what is one of the oldest races in the world ’ and that it was therefore acceptable to come to their aid.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> “Derby Without Gypsies” in *News of the World*, 7 Feb 1937.

<sup>164</sup> “Sunday on Epsom Downs” in *The Times*, 31 May, 1937.

<sup>165</sup> Lady Sybil Grant cited in “Give the Gypsies Justice” in *Manchester Evening News*, 26 May 1937. Grant made similar distinctions between different types of Gypsies in her correspondence with D. Yates of the Gypsy Lore

## Summary

It is difficult to generalise about treatment of Gypsies at the local level. There were exceptions to the patterns of behaviour which have just been outlined. However, it is impossible to defend the proposition put forward by Dora Yates that a new sense of acceptance and toleration of Gypsies was developing in Britain during the early twentieth century.<sup>166</sup> At a local level, the Gypsies continued to be harassed by the authorities in much the same way as during the nineteenth century.<sup>167</sup> There is no doubt that when the vicissitudes of the British Gypsies are considered in relation to the wider European picture, then they could legitimately claim to have been treated with a striking degree of tolerance.<sup>168</sup> However, such comparisons should not be allowed to obscure the fact that the everyday lives of Britain's Gypsy population in the early twentieth century were fraught with obstacles many of which were the making of, or were accentuated by, the activities of the local arm of the state. Without a comprehensive knowledge of the laws under which they were being ejected and prosecuted, the Gypsies were extremely vulnerable to the actions of the police, and the local council and would often become caught in the web of contradictions between the policies of local institutions in the different areas in which they moved.

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Society, 1 April 1937, and stated her intention to confine her efforts at campaigning on behalf of the Gypsies to '...the seventy odd vans about which I know something and which are approved by the police'. GLS Correspondence, I-III, A-G.

<sup>166</sup> See above.

<sup>167</sup> Mayall, *Gypsy Travellers in Nineteenth Century Britain*,

<sup>168</sup> D. Kenrick and G. Puxon, *The Destiny of Europe's Gypsies*, London: Sussex University Press, 1972.

The question of race so often voiced at council meetings and in complaints about the Gypsies from teachers is a complex issue. There can be little doubt that the British Gypsies were widely assumed to be a foreign race during the early twentieth century.<sup>169</sup> Thus, instances in which teachers refused to admit Gypsy children to school on the grounds that they were far below normal intelligence, must be considered in the context of scientific ideas concerning the differing mental capacities of the different races. However, the interest expressed by those who campaigned for the education of Gypsy children in separating the children from the influences of their parents illustrates a belief that it was possible to raise the children above the level of their parents. These two arguments were not necessarily regarded as contradictory. Indeed those who complained about the presence of Gypsies in local schools on the grounds that they were mentally backward, could invoke the argument that such children would be better served away from the influences of their parents in an industrial school. However, the inherent contradiction between the idea that the Gypsies were backward by nature and the idea that they could be raised above their existing condition, highlights the confusion which existed in the common understanding of biological racial difference. Those who campaigned for increased regulation of the Gypsies would often invoke such arguments alongside other, contradictory ideas, with little real concern for their scientific basis.

It is difficult to ascertain the extent to which the differentiation being made between the 'genuine' and 'pseudo' Gypsies at the local level is evidence of a genuine belief in racial

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<sup>169</sup> Evidence of the Gypsies being regarded as a distinct race can be seen in the press, see for example; "Race that Craves Freedom" in *Glasgow News*, 16 March 1935. In this instance the understanding of the Gypsies as a race is probably cultural rather than biological, but elsewhere accounts of the Gypsies were draped in the language of biology. See W. Gallichan "Is the Gipsy Doomed? A Plea for the Romany Race" in *Evening News*, 23 Nov 1906. "Gipsy and Jew: A Parallel Miracle" in *Golden Penny*, Oct 1908. "Queer Communities of Great Britain" in *Poole Herald*, 30 June 1913.

hierarchy or merely evidence of the phraseology of racial science being drafted in to support what was essentially a social complaint. What can be derived from the frequent references to race, is that throughout the early twentieth century, science provided a convenient means through which to justify what might otherwise have been regarded as an unnecessarily severe and repressive treatment of a section of the population.

### **Part Three**

## Chapter Five

### Missionaries and the Gypsies



(9. Abraham West of the London City Mission singing in a Gypsy encampment)

The attention given to the nomadic people of Great Britain by the State and local authorities during the early twentieth century was motivated by secular considerations. The interest in improving the living conditions of the nomads and increasing the education provision for their children was not coupled with any aspiration, within governing circles, to provide religious instruction. In fact, there had been a decline in church attendance throughout British society by the turn of the century, particularly among the working classes.<sup>1</sup> This trend continued throughout the decades of the twentieth century, making the Gypsies less and less conspicuous as a non church-going group. Given the declining church attendance of the lower classes, the fact that numerous organised and individual missions continued to approach the Gypsies in itself requires explanation beyond that of a concern

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<sup>1</sup> J. Stevenson, *British Society 1914-45*. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1984. pp. 360-1.

over an irreligious group. Although many groups failed to fulfil the social roles which were expected of them in terms of church attendance, work, and marriage, and so also attracted the attentions of missionaries, the Gypsy exercised a particular appeal. A number of reasons can be advanced for this special interest. Firstly, there were concerns during the early twentieth century that the numbers of nomadic people on the British roads were increasing. Secondly, despite frequent calls for legislation which would remove such groups from the road, itinerancy persisted and the legislation which was put into force had largely failed to bring about the assimilation of the wanderers. Furthermore, such legislation was aimed at the living conditions and education of the group rather than bringing about the improvements in their moral or spiritual condition sought by missionaries. Thirdly, the work of nineteenth century evangelicals had employed intensely negative stereotypes of the group which had the effect of placing the Gypsies on the lowest rung of the social ladder in Britain, and projecting the image of a heathen and criminal people among whom immorality abounded. Thus, work among the Gypsies took on something of a symbolic appeal to many missionaries. It was hoped that missionary endeavour amongst them would bring about improvements in their social, moral and spiritual condition. Successful work among such a people could inject new enthusiasm and hope into religious organisations at a time when many feared that the country was in a state of moral decline.

The approaches followed by those groups, which engaged in evangelical work amongst the Gypsies, were varied. Much depended on the ideas or personalities of the individual missionaries and groups. Yet an analysis of their work is extremely valuable in helping to understand Gypsy stereotypes and the responses the group encountered. The ways in which the missionaries approached the Gypsies offer considerable insight into their aspirations for the people and a belief in the potential of the Gypsies to benefit from their

work. Often the ideas expressed by missionaries could be a synthesis of the multitude of Gypsy images and stereotypes. By the beginning of the twentieth century, not only negative but romantic stereotypes of the Gypsies were exercising an important influence over the work of missionaries, marking a departure from the ideas of many nineteenth century evangelicals. As was so often the case in the work of the Gypsy Lore Society, and the arguments of politicians, even those who approached the Gypsies from an evangelical background frequently employed the idea of the existence of a nomadic hierarchy to explain the discrepancy between the two sets of images.

### **A Departure from the Nineteenth Century Approach?**

The dominant ideas held by missionaries about the Gypsies during the nineteenth century stemmed largely from the work of Grellmann, Hoyland, Crabb and Baird.<sup>2</sup> There was a tendency among such writers to portray the Gypsies as depraved and wretched outcasts.<sup>3</sup> Many early writers on the Gypsies were guilty of making hysterical exaggerations about the condition in which they lived in the hope of mobilising support for their efforts at reforming them. Religious reform was taken to be synonymous with the giving up of the nomadic way of life and missions to the Gypsies involved an encouragement to them to settle permanently. Similarly, when larger missionary organisations, such as the Salvation Army and the London City Mission approached the Gypsies during the nineteenth century, the emphasis was on persuading them to settle. There was a belief among many missionaries, that the manner and habits of the Gypsies rendered them unfit to be introduced into the wider religious community. In 1869, for example, the London City Mission Society's appointee to

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<sup>2</sup> D. Mayall, *Gypsy-Travellers in Nineteenth Century Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

<sup>3</sup> J. Baird, *The Scottish Gipsy's Advocate: Being A Short Account Of The Gipsies Of Kirk-Yetholm In Connection With A Plan Proposed To Be Adopted For The Improvement Of The Gipsy Population Of Scotland*,



the Gypsies at Peckham Rye urged that ‘until they settle and become house-dwellers they cannot be endured in church or chapel’.<sup>4</sup> The missionary expressed grave concerns over the effect that the presence of Gypsies could have on the wider congregation. Having witnessed the reaction to a group of Gypsies who entered a local church, he reported that:

The congregation was horrified; visions of unclean beasts filtered before their eyes, and as they marched into the body of the church, the devotions of many were sadly disturbed.<sup>5</sup>

A number of missions to the Gypsies during the early twentieth century followed in this assimilationist tradition. Indeed, the work of the Scottish churches among the Tinkers continued to be fuelled by an aspiration to bring about their assimilation throughout the early twentieth century and the Salvation Army, likewise, remained determined that all types of vagrancy should be repressed. Those who sought the assimilation of the Gypsies were effectively making huge demands both on the Gypsies themselves and the sedentary populations. Under assimilationist schemes the Gypsies were required to give up their nomadic habits, and adopt sedentary forms of employment. Many missionaries also considered the separation of parent and child to be vital to the success of the schemes. The success of such initiatives also relied upon the ability of the missionaries to persuade the sedentary local populations to abandon their negative perceptions of the Gypsies and welcome them into the neighbourhood, work place, school and church. Thus efforts to bring about the assimilation of the Gypsies were hugely optimistic.

Consequently, many of the schemes on which missionaries embarked with the hope of

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Edinburgh: John Lindsay, 1839. p. 7.

<sup>4</sup>“Mission Work among the Gipsies of the Metropolis” in *The London City Mission Society Magazine*, Vol. XXXIV, 1 July 1869. p. 145.

<sup>5</sup> “Mission Work Among the Gipsies of the Metropolis” p. 145.

bringing about the assimilation of the Gypsies contain a paradox. Despite their intention that the Gypsies should take their place as respectable citizens, the inability of missionaries to overcome hostility towards the group at the local level led them to the conclusion that for the purpose of religious instruction, the nomads should be kept separate from the wider congregations.<sup>6</sup> Thus, paradoxically, separate provisions for the Gypsies were a common feature of campaigns for their assimilation. Sometimes, the reason for the separate provisions for the travellers could be equally well explained in terms of convenience. Those missionaries who followed the fairs or race meetings and attempted to convert the Gypsies who attended such gatherings found it convenient to adopt this strategy. For example, during the first decade of the twentieth century, Mr C. Chandler, an Eastbourne missionary, and Mr Garlick of London conducted missions to the Gypsies at Epsom, Brighton, Newmarket and Eastbourne race courses; both operated thus.<sup>7</sup> Missionaries would also visit the Gypsies during the hop-picking and fruit-picking seasons when they were gathered together in large numbers as they worked on the land.<sup>8</sup> Yet often deeper fears underlay the preference for keeping the Gypsies apart from the congregations of the local churches. Fears were frequently expressed that the inclusion of the Gypsies in the sedentary Christian community could have a degrading influence on the wider working classes. For example, the Bishop of Exeter was in favour of missionary work among the Gypsies and in the summer of 1908 the Diocese of Exeter sent out a mission van to work with the local nomads under the charge of the Reverend A.G. Bayley.<sup>9</sup> However, there was a fear amongst many Exeter clergymen that the presence of the travellers could ‘play havoc’ with the morals of the parishioners. Bayley

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<sup>6</sup> “Religious Service for the Kingsmoor Gipsies. Rector’s Sermon around the Camp Fire” in *Narberth Weekly News*, 10 June 1937. “Service for the Gipsies. They Listen Attentively while Eating Supper” in *Western Mail*, 9 June 1937.

<sup>7</sup> “Goodwood Races. Eastbourne Missionaries Work” in *Eastbourne Gazette*, 14 Aug 1907.

<sup>8</sup> M. Lewis (ed.), *Old Days in the Kent Hop-Gardens*, Tonbridge: Tonbridge Free Press, 1962. pp. 42.

<sup>9</sup> “Work Among the Gipsies. Exeter Parochial Mission” in *Devon Daily Gazette*, 5 Sept 1908.

himself believed that there was a need for ‘improving the moral stature of the van dwellers’ before they could become part of the wider community and argued that an improvement in the sanitary condition of the travellers was required.<sup>10</sup> There are also examples of the children of the Gypsies being kept apart from local children by the missionaries. Sunday schools for Gypsy children were often conducted separately owing to complaints from local parents at the idea of Gypsies attending Sunday school along with their children. One Gypsy Sunday school held by ‘Gypsy’ Williams the evangelist in the 1930s was held weekly in a cow shed in Kent, owing to objections from local parents and the difficulties in finding a more suitable building.<sup>11</sup>

During the early twentieth century the attitudes of some missionaries towards the Gypsies do appear to have been undergoing a change. There are signs that the emphasis placed on encouraging the Gypsies to settle was, at least within certain organisations, giving way to a more liberal approach in which conversion to Christianity was less frequently perceived as being wholly incompatible with the nomadic way of life. To a certain extent such a change might be attributed to the many failures of the nineteenth century missions to the Gypsies. Even among those missionaries who claimed to have achieved success in encouraging Gypsies to settle, there were admissions that relapses, where the nomads returned once again to the wandering life, were common.<sup>12</sup> Yet, there is also evidence of an increase in prominence of the romantic image of the Gypsy in the work of missionaries, which undoubtedly played an important role in the change in tactics. A nineteenth century missionaries such as Crabb might have balked at the suggestion of a missionary to the

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<sup>10</sup> “Work Among the Gipsies. Exeter Parochial Mission” in *Devon Daily Gazette*, 5 Sept 1908.

<sup>11</sup> “Where the Gypsies Hold Their Sunday School” in *Picture Post*, 25 March 1939.

<sup>12</sup> J. Baird, *First Report of the Committee for the Reformation of the Gipsies in Scotland*, Edinburgh: Thomas

Gypsies joining them in their nomadic way of life. However, during the early twentieth century this approach was increasingly perceived as the logical way forward.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the mission van or tent became a common feature in campaigns for the conversion of the Gypsies by both affiliated and independent missions. The Church Army made use of live-in wagons in its missionary work among the Gypsies of the New Forest. Similarly, many short-term independent missions, such as that run by William Kyle in Yately Village near Hampshire for five weeks in the summer of 1909, also found use for a ‘gospel carriage’.<sup>14</sup> The use of the live-in van as a tool of missionary work or propaganda was commonplace among organisations that hoped to carry their message into rural areas.<sup>15</sup> Yet in work among the Gypsies, the use of the van is illustrative of an important change in approach. It was increasingly felt that there was a higher chance of success in encouraging the Gypsies to adopt the Christian religion without requiring them to give up their nomadic habits. Furthermore, in the words of the Reverend A.W. Badger who worked among Gypsies around the Basingstoke area, there was a belief that: “Its no good pitching religion at the Romany. You have to live it with him”.<sup>16</sup>

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Constable, 1840. p. 16.

<sup>13</sup> An account of an itinerant preacher is provided by F. Jennings, *Men of the Lanes: The Autobiography of the Tramp's Parson*, London: Old Bourne, 1958. See also Swinstead, J., *A Parish on Wheels*, London: Gardner, Darton and Co, 1897.

<sup>14</sup> “Evangelising Gypsies” in *The Christian*, 10 Feb 1910.

<sup>15</sup> “Going A Gipsying. A Week with the Temperance Van” in *Daily Mail*, 6 Aug 1907. “A Missionary of the By-Ways” in *Sunday Strand*, July 1908.

<sup>16</sup> “2 doz. Clothes Pegs Gift to Rector” in *Daily Mirror*, 8 July 1936.

Like members of the Gypsy Lore Society, many missionaries came to take a great pride in their work among the Gypsies. Some wrote of their ability to gain the trust of the mysterious wanderers, learned to speak the Romani language, and adopted an itinerant life themselves. Increasingly, missionaries attempted to meet the Gypsy on his own terms. This inclination led the British and Foreign Bible Society to consider the possibility of translating certain sections of the Bible into the Romani language and in 1908 the Society wrote to Scott Macfie of the Gypsy Lore Society to gather information as to the best way to increase the spread of Christianity among the wandering Gypsies of Europe. Macfie wrote back with a quotation from a tract written by the Gypsy scholar, Reinhold Urban, which upheld the belief of many Gypsy scholars that the Romani language was the only way to gain the trust of the Gypsies. Macfie argued that with it ‘...one will often find the key to the heart of these distrustful, reserved, brown people’.<sup>17</sup> In keeping with Macfie’s suggestion, the British and Foreign Bible Society produced a number of biblical texts in Romani dialects. In 1911, for example, the Society published translations of the gospels for Gypsies in Bulgaria and south Germany.<sup>18</sup> Efforts to use the Romani language to reach the Gypsies continued during the 1930s when the Society commissioned translations of further biblical texts into Romani.<sup>19</sup> Coupled with the increasingly popular belief that the Romani language was the key to successful work among the Gypsies was the idea that the Gypsies themselves, once converted, could be sent out as missionaries. In 1912 the Bishop of Stepney was reported to

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Letter from Scott Macfie to the British and Foreign Bible Society, 11 Nov 1908. Later quoted by the British and Foreign Bible Society in “Editorial echoes” in *The Bible in the World*, May 1909.

<sup>18</sup> J. Roe, *A History of the British and Foreign Bible Society 1905-1954*, London: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1965. p. 44.

<sup>19</sup> F. Ackerley, Review of *The Gospel according to St John in Lettish Romani*, translated for the British and Foreign Bible Society, JGLS, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, vol. 14, pp. 51-55. F. Ackerley, Review of *The Acts of the Apostles in Romani* translated by the British and Foreign Bible Society, in JGLS 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. 16, 1937, pp. 84-89. B. Gilliat-Smith, Review of *The Gospel According to St Luke* translated for the British and Foreign Bible Society,

have told the annual meeting of the British and Foreign Bible Society that, for the precise reason that Gypsies were incorrigible wanderers, a special bid should be made to get hold of them. The Bishop believed that the Gypsies were the most appropriate people to spread far and wide the knowledge of the word of God.<sup>20</sup> However, no action appears to have been taken on this suggestion. Even so, such ideas are illustrative of an increasing awareness among missionaries of the potential of the Gypsies themselves in becoming missionaries, a change which can also be detected in the work of other organisations which took on Gypsies as missionaries both to the Gypsies themselves and to a wider audience.

This change in approach to the Gypsies during the early twentieth century was by no means wholesale. Even among those missionaries who did not regard themselves as having a role in persuading the Gypsies to settle and who postulated the importance of speaking the Romani language, there is evidence of condescending attitudes towards the nomadic way of life which continued to be regarded as harbouring immorality. There remained a conviction among many missionaries that the Gypsies were in need of education on sanitary matters and that women needed to be trained in hygiene and domestic chores.<sup>21</sup> Missionaries also often became frustrated at the lack of importance which nomadic couples placed on having a wedding ceremony in accordance with the Christian religion.<sup>22</sup>

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*JGLS* 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. 17, 1938, pp. 81-84.

<sup>20</sup> "Gipsies as Evangelists" in *Eastern Morning News*, 2 May 1912. "Bishop Praise of Gipsies" In *Daily Graphic*, 2 May 1912.

<sup>21</sup> See for example an article in the Salvation Army Journal by Staff Captain L Marquie, "Caring for the Gipsies in Geneva" in *All the World*, May 1915. pp. 237-239.

<sup>22</sup> See for example *Gipsy Missioning in the New Forest*, Oxford: Church Army Press. 1934. Probably written by Captain R. Thomas.

### **The London City Mission Society**

The London City Mission Society was established in 1835 and its work among the Gypsies commenced just over twenty years later. The founding of the Society was the response of a group of inter-denominational evangelists to declining church attendance throughout London, particularly among the working classes. It was felt that London had degenerated to its lowest condition in a long history and that 'criminal classes monopolised whole districts to themselves'.<sup>23</sup> Early members were repelled by the deplorable social conditions in which many members of the working classes were living and it was believed that whole generations of children were being trained for a life of crime. During the first fifty years of the Society's work among the Gypsies, missionaries expressed fears about the way in which the nomads were living which were similar to their concerns regarding the condition of the wider working classes. However, early LCM missionaries to the Gypsies were also deeply influenced by the work of writers such as Hoyland and Crabb and there was a tendency to view the Gypsies in terms of the negative stereotypes laid down in the work of these earlier figures.

The Society first turned its attention to the Gypsies in 1857 when it was asked by the trustees of the Farnham Institution for the Evangelisation of the Gypsies, which had been founded by the Reverend John Crabb, to continue the work which he had begun. After Crabb's death in 1851 the Committee had continued to employ a missionary to the Gypsies but it was believed that there had been retrogression since the earlier days.<sup>24</sup> With the

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<sup>23</sup> J. Weylland, *These Fifty Years. Being the Jubilee Volume of the London City Mission*, London: SW Partridge and Co, 1884. p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> "The Missionary to the Gipsies" in *The London City Mission Society Magazine*, Vol. XXV, 2 Jan 1860, pp. 1-

resignation of Crabb's successor in 1857, it was decided that the London City Mission Society was the most appropriate institution to continue the work among the Gypsies within the district of the metropolis. The first London City Mission Society appointee to the Gypsies was named the following year and by 1869 several missionaries had devoted themselves to work with the Gypsies and a large tent had been provided as a 'Gypsies' tabernacle' to house the services.<sup>25</sup>

The early observations of London City Missionary Society appointees to the Gypsies were markedly similar to those of Hoyland, Crabb and Baird. The contempt which these scholars had for the Gypsies' way of life, which they considered to be both depraved and immoral, rang out in the reports made by the new generation of missionaries to their headquarters. It was stated that:

...they live in common fellowship with dogs, cats, fowls, birds and vermin. Many of these hovels are very cesspools of filth...Such homes and the wandering life to which they are adapted, must render their inmates the easy prey of fearful ignorance and frightful immorality.<sup>26</sup>

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, romantic images of wanderers were becoming increasingly influential in Britain. However, the LCM missionaries clung to the negative stereotypes of their predecessors. It was feared that romantic images of the Gypsies would do nothing to inspire financial support for missionary work among them. Consequently, the Society emphasised the desperate state in which the Gypsies were living. On occasion, the method employed by missionaries to dispel the romantic stereotype was to draw on images of the Gypsies as a degenerate people in tune with the ideas of the Gypsy Lore Society. It was

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<sup>25</sup> Weyland, *These Fifty Years*, p. 263.

<sup>26</sup> "The Missionary to the Gipsies" p. 17. See also London City Mission Society Auxiliary Report 1858.



claimed that the Gypsies, once a pure and distinctive race, had now been swamped by an unwholesome mass of impersonators:

The number of real gipsies in and around London are yearly decreasing, but their places are being filled with a lot of 'mongrels' who claim to be gipsies but are not. They are very dirty...and if not looked after by the mission, they will, to all human appearance, perish in their sins.<sup>27</sup>

Despite the use of unflattering images of 'mongrel' Gypsy tribes in the reports of missionaries, the LCM., unlike the Gypsy Lore Society, strove to befriend all types of wanderers. The distinctions drawn between different members of the nomadic population were used, like the exaggerations of George Smith of Coalville, to win financial and moral support for the work. The necessity of raising up the nomads from their state of sin was given an added sense of urgency by the argument that a process of degeneration was already underway.

Such images of the Gypsies were slow to change and can still be found in the reports of LCM missionaries at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1909 Samuel Kendon of Goudhurst, who for many years was involved in the London City Mission Society work among the hop-pickers, wrote in reference to the Gypsies:

Alas! with few exceptions they subsist by begging and - lying. Their mode of life prevents them going to school, so, for all useful purposes they are as ignorant and hopeless as the heathen.<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, the following year James Mercer, who was reported to have been responsible for the conversion of a number of Gypsies during his career with the LCM., remarked that the

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<sup>27</sup> "The Gipsies" in *The London City Mission Magazine*, Vol. XLVI, 1 Nov, 1881. p. 230.

<sup>28</sup> "The Gospel In Gipsidom" in *The London City Mission Society Messenger*, Nov 1909, Vol. I, No 9, p. 130.

Gypsies were a degraded people perfectly ignorant of the scriptures.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, in 1909 it was reported that when asked whether the Gypsies had a sense of sin, the reply of the LCM missionary was usually in the negative.<sup>30</sup>

During the early twentieth century the reliance of the LCM missionaries on the ideas of earlier evangelical missions to the Gypsies did begin to decline and in the reports of those who worked among the Gypsies, there was a departure from the use of derogatory images of the nomads. Often missionaries adopted the opposite stereotype and presented the Gypsies as a romantic people among whom to spread the word of God. In an article about the organisation's work among the Gypsies in 1910, for example, the *London City Mission Magazine* painted an image of the Gypsies as an exotic and picturesque people:

Once seen, the true Romany makes an indelible impression. The flaunting air, the whimsical manner, the sense of wonder are among his distinctive characteristics.<sup>31</sup>

Romantic images of the 'true' Gypsies came to have an increasing influence on the Gypsy missionaries. Parallel to the growing evidence of the romantic stereotype among missionaries, and perhaps operating as a means to make sense of the contradictory stereotypes, there was an increasing willingness to accept the Gypsies as individuals rather than anticipating the behaviour of all to be consistent with a stereotype. In 1911 Abraham West of the London City Mission urged that it be remembered that '...all gipsies are not cast in the same mould'.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, in 1920 an LCM missionary reported that: 'They are a

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<sup>29</sup> G. Pearce, "The Worn Out Bible" in *The London City Mission Society Messenger*, Vol. II, No 19, Oct 1910. pp. 157-158.

<sup>30</sup> "The Gospel In Gipsidom" p. 130.

<sup>31</sup> "Glad Tidings from Gipsydom" in *The London City Mission Magazine*, No 897, Vol. LXXVI, Sept 1911. p. 173.

<sup>32</sup> "Glad Tidings from Gipsydom" p. 181.

mixed lot; many are exceedingly nice and well meaning; others delight in drinking and gambling and defile the air with their foul talk'.<sup>33</sup> It was argued that while the behaviour of some Gypsies was indeed consistent with antipathetic stereotypes, more often the nomads welcomed the missionary. Another means through which some missionaries sought to make sense of the contradictory stereotypes of the nomads was to blame the accusations of crime hurled at the Gypsies on other sectors of the nomadic population. Unlike the work of the Gypsy Lore Society, then, the use of romantic images in the work of the LCM was not necessarily a prelude to unflattering images of 'half-breeds'. However, on occasion when a missionary did remark on accusations of crime made against the Gypsies, there was a tendency to ascribe these deeds to a degenerate section of the nomadic population. In such circumstances it would be suggested that in addition to the true Romanies:

There are also half-bred, able bodied gipsies who tour through the villages selling baskets...many have a weakness for visiting gentlemen's estates without being invited, and helping themselves to whatever comes there way.<sup>34</sup>

In much the same way as members of the Gypsy Lore Society, some missionaries came to flatter themselves that they had won the trust of the 'true' Gypsies and joined the elite few non-Gypsies accepted as their intimate friends. Echoing the claims of George Borrow and many members of the Gypsy Lore Society, Abraham West of the LCM., for example, wrote with pride that the Gypsies among whom he worked always greeted him as the 'Romany Rye'.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, whenever a missionary society magazine or even a local newspaper reported on a service being conducted at a local Gypsy camp or the arrival of a Gypsy mission van, the affection aroused among the Gypsies by the missionary was always

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<sup>33</sup> "The Gypsy Problem" in *The London City Mission Magazine*, Vol. 85, No. 1001, August 1920, pp. 89-90.

<sup>34</sup> "The Gypsy Fraternity" in *The London City Mission Magazine*, Vol. LXXV, No. 880, April 1910. p. 86.

<sup>35</sup> "Glad Tidings from Gipsydom" p. 175.

emphasised. The reports, which could be intensely patronising towards the Gypsies, would often suggest that the nomads were glad of the unusual amount of attention being paid to them by the missionaries.

It is dangerous to generalise about the relationships between individual nomads and missionaries. No doubt many genuine friendships were formed which were not characterised by patronising and condescending attitudes to the Gypsies or a false feeling of pride on having been admitted into a secret fraternity on the part of the missionary. In fact, there is evidence of missionaries holding individual Gypsies in great esteem and being acutely aware of the social problems faced by them. It is in their reports on the Gypsies who fought in the First World War and the families they left behind that the missionaries of the LCM most graphically demonstrate their awareness of the great injustices suffered by the nomads. Left to console the distraught relatives of those at the Front, the missionaries were struck by the great irony that with the outbreak of war:

the Government...[has] discovered that the poor gipsy, hitherto hunted from pillar to post, wanted by nobody, welcome nowhere, is, after all, a quantity worth considering.<sup>36</sup>

Despite Abraham West's fanciful perception of himself as the Romany Rye he had a great empathy for the social position of the Gypsies which was often lacking in the work of the Gypsy Lore Society.<sup>37</sup> During the First World War, like many missionaries, West found that many of the Gypsy men whom he was accustomed to meeting at the annual race meetings and in the hop-fields went into military service. However, the press frequently made reports

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<sup>36</sup>"Good News from Gipsydom" in *The London City Mission Magazine*, Vol. 83, No 979, Oct 1918. P. 119.

<sup>37</sup> See D. MacRitchie, "The Privileges of the Gypsies" in *JGLS*, NS, Vol. 1, 1908. p. 322. In reference to the German Gypsies who arrived in Britain between 1904 and 1906, the author argues that forced marches in the wind and rain were regarded lightly by Gypsies.

of Gypsy absentees and some newspapers claimed that the Gypsies would do anything to avoid the draft. Having read a number of such reports, West became enraged by their wild inconsistency with the evidence he saw when he visited the hop-fields. In particular, he complained bitterly at the *Daily Chronicle* for suggesting that the Gypsies 'had to be dragged into the army' and 'did all they could to keep out of the way'.<sup>38</sup> Having witnessed many of the Gypsies leaving the compounds he visited for military service, West protested that:

...they went like men, and many of them made the great sacrifice...The only murmur I heard was that "before the war we were not wanted on the Earth, now they want us to fight for them."<sup>39</sup>

Similarly, the thirty LCM missionaries who visited the hop-fields in Worcester, Kent and Hampshire during the years of war were anxious to let it be known that many of the Gypsy men had already gone into service by September 1915. One missionary wrote an account of a young man who was spending his seven days leave from the Front with his people in a caravan in the hop-gardens. The man had had several of the fingers blown from his right hand during his service and was referred to by the missionary as a 'gipsy hero'.<sup>40</sup>

The missionaries also held those Gypsies who had undergone a process of conversion in great esteem. The LCM was very open to the idea of members of the Gypsy population becoming missionaries to their own people or serving as inspiring examples to lapsed members of the house-dwelling population. The use of Gypsies as missionaries is indicative of a belief in their potential, which was not in evidence during the days of Hoyland and Crabb. As a result, during the early twentieth century, several converted Gypsies became

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<sup>38</sup>"Good News from Gipsydom" p. 119.

<sup>39</sup>"The Gypsy Problem" p. 89-90

<sup>40</sup>"Hop-Field Evangelism" in *The London City Mission Magazine*, Vol. LXXX, No 948. Dec 1915. p. 157.

missionaries working with the London City Mission Society.<sup>41</sup> ‘Gipsy’ Williams was converted by the LCM while working in the hop-fields in Kent in 1918 and in 1929 he began working for the City Mission among slum-dwellers in Blackfriars. During the summer months he was assigned to the hop-pickers mission and sent to Hampshire or Kent until his employment was terminated in 1934 amid rumours of financial mismanagement.<sup>42</sup>

There was in fact a broad acceptance within the Society that talented and dedicated missionaries could be found within the ranks of the nomadic population. However, when it came to generalising about the Gypsies for the purpose of gaining support for their work, the reports of the LCM missionaries continued to portray images of ignorance and sin in much the same way as their predecessors during the nineteenth century. The use of such images was more restrained, however, than in the past with less of a tendency towards wholesale character assassination. Moral improvement was, at least in the work of the LCM, no longer taken to be synonymous with the giving up of the nomadic way of life. However, missionaries did seek to encourage the Gypsies to conform to the ways of settled society in other important ways, and these issues could be exploited as a means of winning support for the work. In particular, they attached great importance to persuading Gypsy couples to undertake a church wedding.<sup>43</sup> An unmarried Gypsy couple encountered by LCM missionary Mr Clarke at Wanstead Flats were reported to be leading a ‘miserable life’ and the missionary

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<sup>41</sup> “Heartening News from Hopland” in *The London City Mission Magazine*, Vol. XCV, No 1124, Nov 1930. pp. 179-180. see also Smith, ‘Gipsy’ Simon, “Scenes and Incidents in Somers Town” in *The London City Mission Society Messenger*, Vol. II, No 17, July 1910. pp. 106-108.

<sup>42</sup> E. Trigg, “Magic and Religion Amongst the Gypsies of Great Britain” PhD thesis, Bodleian library, University of Oxford.

<sup>43</sup> “Work among the Gypsies” in *The London City Mission Magazine*, Vol. XLII, 1 Dec 1877. Pp 262-264.

expressed concern that the couple were ‘bringing up a family following in their steps’.<sup>44</sup>

When it came to the issue of the Gypsies’ knowledge of God and the scriptures, LCM missionaries continued to portray a depraved people living in a state of sin. Even those Gypsies considered by the missionaries to be of ‘true’ blood were not exempt from accusations of depravity when it came to their knowledge of the scriptures. Hence, although in 1927 an LCM missionary writing under the name of Watchman could claim that ‘the true breed are an honest and law-abiding people’, he added:

The prevailing ignorance is incredible. Minds seemed closed to sacred things. They are so dark, so dense, so dead to eternal realities.<sup>45</sup>

Such reports were frequently offered in juxtaposition to reports of successful Gypsy conversions. In 1918, for example, an article by one missionary included a poetic yet intensely patronising description of how ‘a gypsy of true blood, lifted her frank face, beaming like a great child’s as the missionary closed a brief conversation on heavenly things’.<sup>46</sup> Even where converted Gypsies came to be highly respected by the Society, reports often failed to avoid overtones of condescension when describing their former way of life and the way in which they had been transformed by the LCM. One such example can be discovered in the case of the Buckley family. After their conversion the couple purchased an old tramcar which they converted into a ‘tabernacle of witness’ on the Bohemian Estate in Eastwood, Southend.<sup>47</sup> It was reported in the Society’s magazine in 1924 that the Buckley’s tabernacle

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<sup>44</sup> “The Gipsy Missionary” in *The London City Mission Magazine*, Vol. XL, 1 March 1875 Pp 47-48. see also “Evangelistic Work Amongst the Hop-Pickers in Kent” in *The London City Mission Magazine*, Vol. LXVI, 2 Dec, 1901. Pp 297-308.

<sup>45</sup> “The Modern Ishmaelite” in *The London City Mission Magazine*, Vol. XCII, 1927 Pp 60-63.

<sup>46</sup> “Good News from Gipsydom” p. 119.

<sup>47</sup> T. W. Thompson, “Affairs of Egypt 1909” in *JGLS*, NS, Vol. 5, 1911. pp. 113-135 and 114.

had been the birthplace of at least thirty souls.<sup>48</sup> *The London City Mission Magazine* included a number of articles about the work of the Buckleys over the following years. The high esteem in which the family was held by the LCM is clear in all accounts of their work. Indeed, one missionary referred to Mr Buckley, after his conversion by the LCM, as ‘...a saint...illiterate, yet learned in the highest and deepest things...whose thoughts at times were profound and sublime as the Bible itself’.<sup>49</sup> However, to an extent, the interest in the couple’s work was used to emphasise the great success of the LCM among the most degraded of classes. Reports exaggerated the transformation of Mr and Mrs Buckley from the state of ‘a vile sinner and every day a drunkard’ to ‘beautiful Christians’.<sup>50</sup> Thus, although many missionaries themselves had moved away from the negative images of the Gypsy and attempts to bring about their assimilation, the way in which their work was reported still failed to avoid condescending attitudes towards the nomadic way of life completely.

### **The Salvation Army**

The work conducted by the Salvation Army among the Gypsies during the early twentieth century reveals both romantic perceptions of Gypsies and an unyielding conviction that the nomadic way of life harboured immorality and should therefore be abolished. The views expressed by individual Army officers often varied considerably and were not always consistent with the action taken by their headquarters. However, it is possible to draw out a number of themes in the treatment of the Gypsies by the Salvation Army and to highlight divergences between the official stance of the organisation and some of the more localised activity of its officers.

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<sup>48</sup> “The Gypsy’s Triumph” in *The London City Mission Magazine*, Vol. LXXXIX, July 1924. p. 108.

<sup>49</sup> “Good News from Gipsydom” p. 120.

<sup>50</sup> First quotation taken from “Glad Tidings From Gipsydom” p. 180. Second quotation taken from “Good News



Like the London City Mission, the overriding concern of the Salvation Army was that in the towns, the majority of working men and women did not attend church or chapel.<sup>51</sup> However, it would seem that the Gypsies were singled out as a group requiring particular attention early in the history of the Salvation Army and missionaries were sent to areas around London in which large numbers of Gypsies were known to camp. The Army also took advantage of the opportunities for meeting Gypsies whom they found at race meetings and during the hop-picking season.

Like the early missionaries of the LCM, many nineteenth century Salvation Army missionaries who worked among the Gypsies appear to have held an array of unflattering assumptions about the nomadic way of life, a point apparent in a Salvation Army Captain's remark in 1871 that 'Gipsies are universally looked down upon, and deservedly so, for crime is abundant in their midst'.<sup>52</sup> There was a particular concern over the conditions under which the nomads lived when many families came together during the hop-picking seasons. It was believed that 'drinking is freely indulged; foul language abounds...indecent habits are common and open'.<sup>53</sup> A stereotype of the Gypsies as a '...benighted, wicked race' was widely evident and it was felt that work among these people was important and in keeping with the belief that it was sinners Jesus Christ came to save.<sup>54</sup> As was the case in the articles written by employees of the LCM., the reports of Gypsies converted by the Salvation Army

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from Gipsydom" p. 119

<sup>51</sup> D. Read, *Edwardian England 1901-15. Society and Politics*, London: Harrap, 1972. pp. 40-41.

<sup>52</sup> "The Gipsies at Whitechapel" in *The Christian Mission Magazine*, 1 June 1871. p. 92.

<sup>53</sup> Cited in Lewis (ed), *Old Days in the Kent Hop-Gardens*, p. 42.

<sup>54</sup> "The Gipsies at Whitechapel" in *The Christian Mission Magazine*, 1 June 1871. p. 92.

tended to emphasise the ‘...lost and ruined state..’. in which the Gypsies had formerly lived. Indeed, wherever an example of a Gypsy conversion was given in the Salvationist publications of the nineteenth century, the nomad would be described in terms such as a ‘...fearful drunkard and blasphemer’ who had been saved by the Salvation Army.<sup>55</sup>

There is evidence to suggest that by the beginning of the twentieth century some individual Salvation Army officers were more open to romantic images of wanderers and that such sentiments influenced their approach to Gypsies in certain circumstances. It would also seem that some officers drew distinctions between different groups of nomads and that these played a part in the way in which they responded to them. Certainly, the idea that there existed a group of ‘true’ Romanies and that many Gypsies were not genuine can be found in the reports and writings of Salvation Army officers. Adjectives used to describe travellers not believed to be genuine Romanies could be unflattering. One missionary who was rather badly received by a group of van-dwellers outside London referred to them as:

loquacious cockneys all of them, from the fleet-footed midget with the tousled head and grimy face...to his father in pearls who smoked strong tobacco, spat disgustingly, and indulged in red-hot adjectives.<sup>56</sup>

The same writer claimed that ‘Real Romany folk were hard to find, but they were well worth the trouble...’ and described the warm welcome which groups of ‘genuine’ Gypsies gave him.<sup>57</sup>

While individual officers of the Salvation Army may have discriminated and even

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<sup>55</sup> J.F.R. “The Christian Mission Among the Gipsies” in *The Christian Mission Magazine*, 1 Sept 1870. Pp 138-139.

<sup>56</sup> “Life in a Gipsy Van” in *The War Cry*, 17 Oct 1903. p. 3.

drawn hierarchical distinctions between different groups of travellers this was not the case at the Salvation Army headquarters. Indeed, despite the warmth with which some of its officers wrote about the 'genuine' Gypsies, during the early twentieth century the Salvation Army sought to push the Government to introduce repressive anti-vagrancy measures which would have applied to all wanderers. There was a great deal of concern within the Salvation Army leadership about vagrancy and the evils which the wandering life was believed to encourage. It was believed that the existing legislation aimed at vagrancy did nothing in the way of reforming the vagrant. In particular, it was claimed that the short prison sentences for those convicted under the 1824 Vagrancy Act only encouraged the problem and that longer periods of confinement were required for 'incurable rogues'.<sup>58</sup> Such sentiments lead the Salvation Army to call upon the Government to introduce harsher penalties for those who persistently wandered. Despite the concerns already being voiced about the severity of the existing Vagrancy Act, in 1904 the Salvation Army became the force behind a new Vagrancy Bill, presented by General Booth, which included more repressive measures than the existing legislation.

The support for new legislation appears to have been fuelled by a resolute distaste for nomadism and a frustration at the apparent failure of existing legislation to remove the vagrant from the road altogether. There appears to have been an assumption among the

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<sup>57</sup> "Life in a Gipsy Van" p. 3.

<sup>58</sup> Secretary of State Memo on 1904 Vagrancy Bill and the introduction of labour colonies. PRO: HO45/10520/138276/57.

advocates of the Bill that vagrancy was caused by an innate inability within the nomadic groups to adapt to a settled lifestyle. Therefore the Salvation Army proposed that labour colonies be introduced to deal with those convicted of serial offences under the Act. It recommended that the minimum sentence for the incorrigible rogue should be three years. It was believed that, while short prison sentences did nothing to alter the ingrained tendency towards wandering, over a longer period of time, with proper instruction, some improvement could be attained. The labour colonies it proposed were to be run by charities and by the Municipal and Poor Law Authorities.<sup>59</sup> The Vagrancy Bill drawn up by the Army relied on the definitions of vagrants provided in the 1824 Vagrancy Act. There is no evidence to suggest that the bill was aimed directly at or indeed intended to apply at all to Gypsies. Indeed, the Salvation Army was involved in work among other nomadic and homeless groups during this period and it is clear that many of its officers attempted to draw distinctions between different groups of nomads. In fact, a later publication by Mrs Bramwell Booth argued that the Gypsies were *bona fide* wanderers. However, there can be little doubt that had the bill been passed, the severe measures which it included could have been brought down against all wanderers in the same way as the 1824 Vagrancy Act.

The report of the 1906 Departmental Committee on Vagrancy was favourable to Booth's suggestions. However, the Government decided to postpone action until it had received the report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws, which dealt with related matters. However, by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century there had still been no action taken on the proposals of the Salvation Army or the recommendations of the 1906 Departmental Committee on Vagrancy.

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<sup>59</sup> The Salvation Army, *The Vagrant and Unemployable. A Plea for Compulsory Restraint of Vagrants and their Employment in Labour Colonies*, London: The Salvation Army, 1909.

Disappointed by the failure of the Vagrancy Bill, in 1909, David C. Lamb of the Salvation Army issued a report on the evils believed to be associated with vagrancy, in the hope of mobilising support for the Army's continuing calls for reform of the vagrancy legislation. Lamb argued that the dangers were threefold. Firstly, 'the propagation of an undesirable species', secondly, 'the dissemination of disease' and thirdly, the danger of 'moral corruption.'<sup>60</sup> All of these evils were, he considered, made possible by indiscriminate charity and would be eliminated with the establishment of labour colonies. The following year Arnold White, a journalist and campaigner on public issues, wrote *The Great Idea*, a book which was presented as an eye-witness account of the work of the Salvation Army among vagrants.<sup>61</sup> White, who had supported the proposals of the 1904 Bill, argued that, although a small proportion of the public preferred gentle methods for the removal of vagrants, on the whole public opinion was ripe for their compulsory detention.<sup>62</sup>

Thus the Salvation Army continued in its efforts to bring the issue of vagrancy to the attention of the Home Office. The Home Secretary appears to have been willing to consider the proposals, and, in 1910, sought the opinion of Sydney Webb who agreed that a bill, similar to that presented by the Salvation Army in 1904, could be a 'useful way of getting in the thin end of the wedge'.<sup>63</sup> However, Webb also expressed concern at the proposal that

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<sup>60</sup> Report by D. Lamb in The Salvation Army, *The Vagrant and Unemployable*. p. 27.

<sup>61</sup> As well writing on the vagrancy, White campaigned on social issues including immigration and was known for his anti-semitic views. For biographical details see *Who Was Who 1916-1928*, London: A.C. Black, 1929. p. 1116. White's other publications include *The Destitute Alien. A Series of Papers Dealing with the Subject of Foreign Pauper Immigration*, New York: Scribners, 1892; *The Modern Jew*, London: Heinemann, 1899; *Efficiency and Empire*, London: Methuen, 1901.

<sup>62</sup> A. White, *The Great Idea. Notes by an Eye-Witness on Some of the Social Work of the Salvation Army*, London: The Salvation Army, 1909-1910. p. 37-38.

<sup>63</sup> Letter from S. Webb to Churchill, 17 May 1910. HO45/10520/138276/66.

bodies such as the Salvation Army should be left to run the labour colonies for those convicted under such legislation. He argued that allowing religious organisations to run the colonies would enable their officers to subject their inmates to compulsory religious influences. Moreover, the Home Office was of the opinion that vagrancy was a social problem rather than some kind of biological disorder which the Secretary of State considered was implied by the longevity of the three year sentences proposed.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, it was believed that there existed too great a public feeling against the punishing of people for sleeping out and begging for an attempt to introduce harsher measures. Therefore, when, in 1911, Colonel Unsworth of the Salvation Army presented to the Home Office a further draft Bill dealing with the question of vagrancy and unemployment, he met with opposition. Like the proposal of 1904, the 1911 Bill recommended that anyone found guilty of being an idle, disorderly person, rogue, vagabond or incorrigible rogue under the Act of 1824 should be committed to a reformatory detention colony for up to a year instead of being given a short stay in prison.<sup>65</sup> However, once again the Home Office was not prepared to accept the establishment of labour colonies and the bill never became law.

Despite the Salvation Army's interest in legislation designed to prevent nomadism, there was undoubtedly an awareness among its missionaries of the social problems faced by Gypsies. Indeed, in 1903 one Salvation Army Officer observed that the daily life of the Gypsy '...appears to be made up of efforts to get out of hear-shot of the inexorable voice of authority, which cries "Move on - move on!"'<sup>66</sup> On occasion, the terrible difficulties faced by

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<sup>64</sup> HO Memo 4 Nov 1903. PRO: HO45/10499/117669/1.

<sup>65</sup> Letter from Colonel Unsworth, Salvation Army to the Secretary of State, 3 March 1911. PRO: HO 45/10578/179621/2.

<sup>66</sup> "Life in a Gipsy Van" p. 3.

the Gypsies led the missionaries to take active measures to try and help them in a more practical way. Hence in November 1913 Adjutant Pate of the Salvation Army in Hertfordshire helped to raise the money for a nomadic couple to be provided with a new horse after they became stranded when their existing horse was stabbed by an unknown party and bled to death.<sup>67</sup> However, despite the work of individual officers to improve conditions for the nomads at the local level, the Army's measures pressed the Government to introduce more assimilationist legislation which would undoubtedly have been used to frustrate the lives of Gypsies had it been introduced.

The concern of the Salvation Army over the need to abolish vagrancy declined with the outbreak of the First World War and the notable fall in the number of people living an itinerant life. The Salvation Army acknowledged as much and in 1929 the International Social Secretary to the Salvation Army David C. Lamb wrote that:

In our opinion, the conditions created by the Great War, made a profound change in this stratum of society. The vagrant was practically eliminated, and we hoped that this country would never again revert to the unsatisfactory conditions of pre-war days, which saw thousands of men - for one reason or another - on the road.<sup>68</sup>

Indeed, throughout the 1920s and '30s the authorities within the Salvation Army appear to have considered that the conditions prevailing among the nomadic communities in Britain were an improvement on the pre-war years.<sup>69</sup> Yet, despite the belief in the decline in vagrancy, missionaries continued to be suspicious of the wandering lifestyle which was

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<sup>67</sup> "Gipsies Stranded. Salvation Army to the Rescue" in *Hertfordshire Advertiser*, 6 Dec 1913.

<sup>68</sup> Written statement by D. C. Lamb of the Salvation Army to the *Departmental Committee on the Relief of the Casual Poor*, (1929). PRO: MH/86/12.

<sup>69</sup> Written statement by H.P Muir, Salvation Army Headquarters to the 1934-6 *Departmental Committee on Vagrancy in Scotland*, (1918). NAS: HH61/84/50.

considered to harbour immorality. Surprisingly, given that many individuals took to the roads in search of work during the 1930s, the official 'line' of the Salvation Army was that labour shortages were present in many districts and therefore there was no excuse for increasing numbers of nomads on the roads. It was argued that the police should continue to deal with all itinerants and that those found guilty should be given long spells in prison.

Like the London City Mission, the Salvation Army was also open to the ideas of using converted Gypsies as missionaries to other Gypsies and to the wider population and counted 'Gypsy' Rodney Smith who became a world famous evangelist as its most notable recruit.<sup>70</sup> In fact, Smith, who was recruited to the Salvation Army after impressing William Booth with his preaching at the age of seventeen, was only one of several dozen Gypsy evangelists who worked for the Salvation Army during the early twentieth century.<sup>71</sup> Smith and his sister, who also served as an Army missionary, were both impressed with the idea that the nomadic way of life was reprehensible. Both evangelists took to a settled life as missionaries, owing to the moral dangers they considered to be attached to itinerancy.<sup>72</sup> However, during the early twentieth century it does not appear that the Salvation Army required missionaries chosen from among the Gypsies to give up their wandering lifestyle. In fact, like the British and Foreign Bible Society, the Army appears to have recognised the advantages of missionaries who could travel throughout the country. For example, the Salvation Army converted 'Gipsy' George Richard Knight and his wife Sally Knight during the later nineteenth century and, after becoming missionaries, they remained itinerant and went on to establish the Army

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<sup>70</sup> Letter from General W. Booth to W. ? 23 May, 1877. Among the Gypsy Papers held at the Salvation Army Headquarters. See also Murray, *Sixty Years an Evangelist: An Intimate Study of Gipsy Smith*, London and Edinburgh: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1937.

<sup>71</sup> S. Cranford, "The Gypsy Evangelical Church" in *The Ecumenical Review*, 1979. Vol. 31. Pt 3. pp. 289-295.

<sup>72</sup> R. Smith, *His Life and Work by Himself*, London : 1902.



in many parts of their native Suffolk during the early twentieth century. The fact that the Knights continued in their itinerant way of life after they had begun their work for the Salvation Army appears inconsistent with the official line of the Salvation Army that all types of vagrancy should be repressed. However, it is possible that by this time the opposition of the Salvation Army focused on the evils that they believed an itinerant life could give rise to rather than the act of wandering itself. Hence there would not appear to be a danger in those who had converted to Christianity and begun to serve God remaining on the road. However, it would seem that though there was no opposition to itinerant missionaries from the Salvation Army, within the localities particular problems were faced by those Gypsies who chose to undertake missionary work. On occasion there was great opposition to their preaching in the villages through which they travelled and, speaking to an interviewer for the Salvation Army in 1926, Knight recalled a number of occasions on which he and his wife had been met by hostile crowds.<sup>73</sup>

Despite the Salvation Army's belief in the potential of the Gypsies as missionaries they often failed to avoid overtones of condescension in their activity among them. Hence one Salvation Army officer employed to work among the hop-pickers wrote an account of how her charges responded quickly to kindness and had '...an implicit child-like trust in non-professional advice that makes it an easy task to help them.'<sup>74</sup>

The Salvation Army never developed a missionary scheme aimed exclusively at the

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<sup>73</sup> N. Wills, "Gipsy Knight and Happy Sally. An Inspiring Story of a Long Salvation Trail" in *All the World*, Vol. XLVI, No 7, Aug, 1926. pp. 297-303.

<sup>74</sup> E. Farrar, "The Gentle Sisters who Bring Hope and Comfort to the Poor" in *The Girls Realm*, 1905. p. 907. For further accounts of Gypsies converted in the hop-gardens by the Salvation Army see "In the Hopfields" in *The War Cry*, 24 Sept 1887. p. 1-2.

Gypsies. Nor did it adopt an official viewpoint on the group. Although some individual officers did hold to romantic sentiments about the wandering way of life of the 'genuine' Gypsy and appear to have differentiated them from the wider nomadic population of vagrants and seasonal labourers, such distinctions were rarely drawn at the Army's headquarters. At this level, the prevailing view was that all itinerant should be abolished, if necessary, through harsh and assimilationist legislation.

### **The Scottish Churches**

There were a number of missionary organisations working among nomadic groups in England and Wales during the early twentieth century and on occasion a local church or a particular diocese of the Church of England also attempted to make special provision for the travellers in their area. However, there does not appear to have been any concerted effort by the Church of England or the Welsh churches to bring about either the conversion or settlement of the Gypsies at a national level. In this important respect, the attention given to nomadic groups in Scotland by the established churches differed markedly from the situation which prevailed in England and Wales. In fact, the Scottish churches were engaged in political crusades and missionary campaigns which involved efforts both to take religion to the Scottish Tinkers and bring about their settlement, throughout much of the early twentieth century. As was the case with the Salvation Army, the approach of the Scottish churches to the nomads was assimilationist. However, the Scottish churches were in a better position to raise funds for their work and exert political pressure than the other missionary organisations working among nomadic groups during this period.

The efforts made by John Baird to evangelise the Gypsies of Kirk Yetholm during the

nineteenth century had largely ended with the death of his successor at Kirk Yetholm.<sup>75</sup> However, the work of these early missionaries to the Scottish Gypsies remained influential, and when the Scottish churches took up the cause of the nomads during the early twentieth century their work remained consistent with that of Baird in a number of important respects. Throughout the early twentieth century a conviction persisted among representatives of the Scottish churches that the conversion of the Tinkers must be accompanied by their permanent settlement. Furthermore, echoing the words of Grellmann, Baird had argued that the surest way to put a stop to the nomadic way of life was to work with the children of the wanderers. In keeping with this suggestion, in their work among the nomads the Scottish churches placed great emphasis on the provision of religious instruction and education to the children, and in some instances attempted to encourage the separation of the children from their parents.

The attention of the Scottish churches was directed towards the travellers towards the turn of the century.<sup>76</sup> In 1894, for instance, the attention of the Education Committee of the Free Church of Scotland was drawn to the children of the Scottish Tinkers by a letter from the Wick School Board. The School Board complained that under existing legislation, the nomads could only be prosecuted for failing to send their children to school if they remained living in the area. Therefore it was argued that proceedings often failed because parents simply moved out of the locality whenever they felt threatened by the authorities.<sup>77</sup> The Education Committee resolved to consider the matter and, having conducted some preliminary investigations into the Tinker way of life, concluded that many Tinker children

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<sup>75</sup> W. Brockie, *The Gypsies of Yetholm*, Kelso: J and J.H Rutherford, 1884. p. 108. see also Baird, *The Scottish Gipsy's Advocate*,

<sup>76</sup> E. Trigg, "Magic and Religion Amongst the Gypsies of Britain" PhD thesis, Bodlian Library, University of Oxford. p. 393.

<sup>77</sup> Free Church of Scotland Education Committee. Report and Deputation Tinker Children to Lord Balfour,

never attended school or received moral training. It was believed that immorality was rife among the nomads and that their children were ‘...subjected to evil influences of the worst character’.<sup>78</sup> In particular, it was claimed that sexual immorality must arise when nomads of both sexes and of all ages slept in the same tents or vans. The committee came to the conclusion that fresh legislation was needed to compel the Tinkers to send their children to school. However, it was believed that increased school attendance was only part of the answer to the Tinker problem. In addition, it was argued that a wider scheme of moral regeneration and permanent settlement was desperately needed.

Having gained the support of Presbyteries and Synods of Perthshire and the Education Committee of the Church of Scotland as well as the General Assembly of the Free Church, in 1869 the Education Committee of the Free Church of Scotland made a deputation on the issue of Tinker children to the Scottish Secretary, Lord Balfour who they presented with a draft bill for securing the education of such children.<sup>79</sup> It included a proposal for a scheme to register all Tinkers with the county councils. Furthermore it advocated the full-time settlement of at least one Tinker parent in a dwelling approved by the local authorities while their children attended school. The Bill called for those who failed to comply with its proposals to have their children removed and placed in an industrial school. Balfour agreed that there was a problem in securing the education of the Tinker children. However, he found the proposals to be impractical and informed the Committee that the Bill was in advance of what public opinion would allow. Despite disappointment over the failure to gain the support of Lord Balfour, there remained those within the Scottish churches who continued to express

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Secretary for Scotland, 30 Jan 1897. NAS: HH55/236.

<sup>78</sup> Free Church of Scotland Education Committee. Report and Deputation Tinker Children to Lord Balfour, Secretary for Scotland, 30 Jan 1897. NAS: HH55/236.

<sup>79</sup> “The Education of Tinker Children. Deputation to the Scottish Secretary” in *The Scotsman*, 3 Feb 1896.

concerns over the condition and welfare of the Tinkers, and it would seem that the local authorities in many areas supported calls for reform.

The Scottish churches had already been involved in work among the Tinkers whom they had met, along with other migrant workers, during the berry-picking seasons.<sup>80</sup> However, during the First World War it was reported that the type of berry-picker had changed and that, with the movement of the nomadic classes into the forces, berry picking was now largely carried out by groups such as teachers who volunteered to help with the harvesting during the school holidays.<sup>81</sup> Thus, during wartime years, concern within the Scottish churches about the moral failings of the berry-picking classes declined. By contrast, however, the churches were extremely concerned about the conditions under which Tinkers who had taken to the towns during the war were now living. It was considered that the situation required urgent attention and in 1916 a bilateral decision taken by the Scottish churches led them to establish a Central Committee for the Welfare of Tinkers designed to offer religious instruction and welfare aid to the nomads.<sup>82</sup> The chairman of the Committee was Dr R. Menzies Ferguson and Miss E. Campbell Colquhoun was appointed honorary secretary. The Central Committee continued the efforts of the Education Committee of the

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<sup>80</sup> Minutes of the Home Mission Committee of the Church of Scotland. 8 March 1917. Vol. III. p. 185. NAS: CH1/16/12. Mentions missions to Berry-pickers in the parishes of Raltray, Blairgowrie, Auchterarder and Coupar Angus.

<sup>81</sup> Report of the Home Mission Committee to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 1920. NAS: CH1/8/55.

<sup>82</sup> The focus of this investigation into the work of the Scottish churches has been on the perceptions of the nomads held by missionaries and the way in which these influenced their treatment of the group. A more detailed and chronological account of the work actually carried out by the Scottish churches among the Gypsies can be found elsewhere. See D. Sutherland's report on the work of the Scottish churches in H. Gentleman and s. Swift, *Scotland's Travelling People. Problems and Solutions*, Edinburgh: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1971. See also J. S. Andrews, "Missionary and Allied Material in the Romany Collection of the University of Leeds" in *International Review of Missions*, Vol. XLVI, Oct 1951. pp. 424-431.

Church of Scotland to pressure parliament to take action in order to improve the living conditions of the Tinkers. Indeed, it will be remembered that it was the Central Committee's representations to the Scottish Secretary, which facilitated the 1917-18 Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland, which was also chaired by Ferguson. In addition to lobbying the Government, the Committee also conducted its own work amongst the nomads with a view to bringing about improvements in their social and moral condition, in the course of which, in 1918 it was reported to be '...anxious that no time should be lost in bringing some spiritual influence to bear upon a class that has been neglected for centuries'.<sup>83</sup>

In view of the high priority accorded to the settlement of Tinkers by the Central Committee it embarked in 1917 on a scheme to encourage it in the county of Caithness. The scheme was successful in attracting the support of the Duke of Portland who donated £100 towards it.<sup>84</sup> The Committee also attempted to obtain old army huts to convert into suitable dwelling places for nomads. However, it was found that although it was possible to obtain the huts, it was impossible to find a landlord who was prepared to allow them to be placed on his land. Consequently, the scheme was abandoned and the huts sold.<sup>85</sup> Such problems convinced the Central Committee that local support for encouraging the Tinkers to settle was urgently needed if housing schemes were to be successful. Thus in 1918 the Committee appointed Miss E. Campbell Colquhoun as an agent to work with the Tinkers with a view to improving links between the Tinker community and the local churches. Colquhoun subsequently produced a booklet entitled *The Tinker Problem* and began carrying out

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<sup>83</sup> Minutes of the Home Mission Committee of the Free Church of Scotland, 17 Sept 1918. Vol. IV. p. 1182. NAS: CH3/982/6.

<sup>84</sup> "Caithness Tinkers. Amelioration of Social Conditions" in *The Scotsman*, 28 April 1917.

<sup>85</sup> Minutes of the Home Mission Committee of the Free Church of Scotland, 21 June 1921. Vol. V. p. 1516. NAS: CH3/982/8.

religious meetings for Tinkers in Perth. With a view to improving links between the Tinkers and the local churches, Colquhoun made a representation to the Home Mission Committee of the United Free Church, and called for the agencies of the church to be utilised in work with the Tinkers at the local level. The Home Mission Committee appears to have been in favour of the involvement of the Presbyteries in the work of the Central Committee and agreed to send out a letter encouraging them to consider what their ministers could do to help the Tinkers.<sup>86</sup> In addition, the Home Mission Committee produced over two hundred copies of Colquhoun's Booklet *The Tinker Problem*, which were distributed between thirty six Presbyteries. Given the prevalence of negative stereotypes of the Tinkers at the local level in Scotland, the hope of gaining the support of the Presbyteries was optimistic and indeed, the call to become involved with work among the Tinkers appears to have fallen on deaf ears. After the distribution of the booklet only one reply was received by the Home Mission Committee from a Presbytery that was willing to help the Central Committee in its work among the nomads.<sup>87</sup>

By 1921 the Central Committee concluded that only a limited degree of success had been achieved. Although Colquhoun's booklet had helped to secure further financial support for the work, it was proving difficult to improve the links between the Tinkers and the sedentary populations.<sup>88</sup> Having failed to gain the support of the Presbyteries in the work among the Tinkers, the Committee came to the conclusion that separate provisions were

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<sup>86</sup> Minutes of the Home Mission Committee of the Free Church of Scotland, 13 June 1920. Vol. V. p. 1364. NAS: CH3/982/8.

<sup>87</sup> Minutes of the Home Mission Committee of the Free Church of Scotland, 21 Sept 1920. Vol. V. p. 1371. NAS: CH3/982/8.

<sup>88</sup> Minutes of the Home Mission Committee of the Free Church of Scotland, 21 Jan 1919. Vol. V. p. 1221. NAS: CH3/982/8.

required for the nomads. Thus the Central Committee also appointed Helen Hardy as a missionary agent, to carry out work among the Tinkers and to obtain more information on how to improve their condition.<sup>89</sup> Hardy's father, a Perthshire minister, had worked amongst the Scottish travellers for many years. He had developed a deep interest in this group and been widely known by his colleagues in the church as 'The Tinker's Friend'.<sup>90</sup> Like her father, Hardy had a wide experience of social work and also a great sympathy for the Tinkers. Contrary to the views on the Gypsies expressed by Baird during the nineteenth century, Hardy did not tend to portray the Tinkers as a wholly immoral group. Instead, she argued that their reputation was often tarred by the behaviour of other members of the nomadic population. She argued that Tinkers loved family life and posed no threat to women and therefore should be treated differently from tramps. Furthermore, she believed that heavy drinking was now less prevalent, than it had been in the past and that where it persisted it was due largely to the Tinkers being barred from the social activities of the wider community.<sup>91</sup> Hardy also considered that the Tinkers were suffering greatly owing to problems in finding campsites during the summer and affordable rents in town during the winter. This latter problem she claimed had forced the Tinkers into slums, particularly in winter months during the First World War. She expressed her concerns over the migration of the Tinkers into such conditions, arguing that, once there they would lose many of their own admirable characteristics and adopt those of their fellow slum inhabitants.

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<sup>89</sup> Written statement by Helen Hardy to the *Departmental Committee on Vagrancy in Scotland*, (1934). NAS: HH61/84/52.

<sup>90</sup> Report of the Home Mission Committee to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 1925. p. 310. NAS: CH1/8/60.

<sup>91</sup> Written statement by Helen Hardy to the *Departmental Committee on Vagrancy in Scotland*, (1934). NAS: HH61/84/52.



The year after her appointment by the Central Committee, Hardy reported that the conditions in which the Tinkers were living in the towns were deplorable.<sup>92</sup> However, despite her sympathy for the Tinkers' plight and her determination that they should not be pushed into the slums, Hardy advocated their gradual assimilation. It was her hope that the nomads could be provided with permanent camping grounds until such time as suitable houses could be made available for them. Not only was Hardy convinced that the Tinkers could and should be made to settle permanently but she also believed that, '...the Tinkers themselves do desire better things, and even a more settled way of life'.<sup>93</sup> Given the problems which Scottish nomads were experiencing in finding summer camping grounds and winter housing during this period it is possible that in some instances there was a greater inclination to settle than there had been in the past. However, Hardy regarded permanent settlement not as a means to relieve the nomads from the problems of finding accommodation but as a means of uplifting the group morally and spiritually.<sup>94</sup>

In addition to Hardy, the Church appointed a Camp Officer who had the task of finding suitable permanent camping sites for the nomads. It was hoped that if the Tinkers could be found a place to settle it would be possible for the education authorities to ensure their children attended school.<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, between 1922 and 1923 the Central Committee provided a hostel for Tinker children. It was based in the buildings of Craige

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<sup>92</sup> "Tinker's Children. Summer Migration" in *The Scotsman*, 29 March 1922.

<sup>93</sup> Report by Helen Hardy quoted in the Report of the Women's Home Mission of the Free Church of Scotland, 1923-4. p. 37. NAS: CH3/982/16.

<sup>94</sup> Report by Helen Hardy quoted in the Report of the Women's Home Mission of the Free Church of Scotland, 1923-4. p. 37. NAS: CH3/982/16.

<sup>95</sup> Report of the Home Mission Committee to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 1927. NAS: CH1/8/62.

Industrial School, which were no longer required by Perth and Kinross Joint County Council. Under the scheme the Tinker parents were encouraged to allow their children to be separated from them on a voluntary basis and placed under the care of the hostel matron, a position assigned to Miss Colquhoun.<sup>96</sup> The hostel could cater for up to twelve children at any one time although the actual number of children in residence never reached more than eleven and the average number of residents was seven. The provision of the hostel was in keeping with the ideas of nineteenth century writers on Gypsies, that if the children could be separated from their parents and given an education they would be prevented from following in their nomadic habits. Indeed, the provision of education was often considered to go hand in hand with schemes for the settlement of nomadic groups. However, it was reported that many parents were reluctant to leave their children at the hostel because of a ‘...suspicion on the part of the Tinkers that if they sent their children there they might not get them back again’.<sup>97</sup> The Central Committee endeavoured to overcome this problem by inviting Tinker parents to visit their children at the hostel, hoping that such visits might also enable the Committee to influence the Tinker parents through their children. Initially it was believed by the Central Committee that the hostel had been a success and a sub-committee was established to investigate the possibility of expanding the scheme to other areas. However, eventually such plans had to be given up when no further suitable buildings could be found. It has to be said that not all those involved in the work of the Scottish churches among the Tinkers appear to have agreed in principle with the idea of separating parent and child and in evidence to the 1934-36 Committee on Vagrancy in Scotland Hardy expressed her concerns on this score.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Report of the Women’s Home Mission of the Free Church of Scotland, 1923-4. pp. 36-37. NAS: CH3/982/16.

<sup>97</sup> Report of the Women’s Home Mission of the Free Church of Scotland, 1923-4. p. 36. NAS: CH3/982/16.

<sup>98</sup> Written statement by Helen Hardy to the *Departmental Committee on Vagrancy in Scotland*, (1934). NAS: HH61/84/52.

Although the Central Committee hoped to create links between the Tinkers and the local community, in reality separate school provision was considered to be the most practical way forwards, a strategy favoured by Hardy. She had first hand experience of antipathy towards Tinkers who wished to attend prayer meetings along with the sedentary population. During the war, for example, she had been involved with a small religious meeting for women in Perth and reported that the meetings had been well attended until the appearance of a number of Tinker women, who had been forced to settle in Perth during the War. In such circumstances Hardy found that the arrival of these Tinker women drove other females away and ultimately the meetings had to be given up.<sup>99</sup> So strong were negative stereotypes of travellers among the general public that many found the idea of their being incorporated into the existing religious community intolerable. Similar concerns were also expressed towards the idea of Tinker children attending school with those from sedentary families. For example, in 1933 *The Perthshire Constitutional* reported a growing feeling among sedentary families against their children attending school along with Tinker children.<sup>100</sup> Thus, even where missionaries themselves preferred not to isolate nomads from the wider religious community, schemes to provide separate provisions grew out of the popular antipathy towards the nomads.

In reports to the churches on her work among the Tinkers, Hardy emphasised their dreadful living conditions. Yet she also wrote of how amenable the Tinkers were to her missionary efforts. In one instance she claimed to have heard urgent appeals for help from Tinkers on the road in Ross-shire to ‘...lift them out of the wretched uninhabitable hovels

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<sup>99</sup> Written statement by Helen Hardy to the *Departmental Committee on Vagrancy in Scotland*, (1934). NAS: HH61/84/52.

<sup>100</sup> “Church’s Scheme for Perthshire Tinkers” in *The Perthshire Constitutional*, 8 Feb 1933.

that are their only shelter'.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, she emphasised the general responsiveness of the Tinkers to religious teaching. She wrote: 'In most Tinkers I have met there is a simple childlike faith in God, which is often very touching'.<sup>102</sup> In order to maintain the support of the churches, Hardy emphasised the amount of spiritual work being carried out among the Tinkers. However, she was also anxious to gain support for her interest in securing the settlement of the group. Therefore, she also emphasised the problems in securing continuity of religious teaching for the Tinkers owing to their migratory habits. Such accounts eventually made an impression on the Scottish churches. In a report to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1925, the Home Mission Committee commended the way in which Hardy had shown herself to be '...wonderfully successful in getting into touch with these wanderers and their children'.<sup>103</sup> Thus throughout the 1920s Hardy proved adept in gaining financial support for the continuation of the work of the Central Committee among the Tinkers from the Scottish churches. However, no further agents were appointed to conduct missionary work among the Tinkers alongside Hardy and the work of the Central Committee was confined almost entirely to Perth, Fife and Kinross.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Report by Helen Hardy quoted in the Report of the Women's Home Mission of the Free Church of Scotland, 1924-5, p. 37. NAS: CH3/982/16.

<sup>102</sup> Report by Helen Hardy quoted in the Report of the Women's Home Mission of the Free Church of Scotland, 1925-6, p. 25. NAS: CH3/982/16.

<sup>103</sup> Report of the Home Mission Committee to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 1925. NAS: CH1/8/60.

<sup>104</sup> Report of the Home Mission Committee to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 1926. NAS: CH1/8/61.

By 1929 support for the Central Committee from the Free Churches of Scotland had begun to decline. In such circumstances Hardy made an anxious appeal to the Home Mission Committee of the Church of Scotland urging the continuation of finance for the work. She argued:

That the results are slow to show themselves can readily be understood when the long tradition lying behind the wandering life of the Tinker is considered; but a new vision is presented to the children, and thoughts are finding a place in their minds which are bound to influence for good their outlook on life.<sup>105</sup>

The decision was made to divide the country into three areas for the purpose of missionary work. The Church of Scotland was to be responsible for the largest area but the Free Church would co-ordinate efforts in the North and Outer Hebrides, while the Scottish Episcopal Church would focus its attentions on the Lothians and Border counties. In 1931 the Central Committee for the Welfare of Tinkers was replaced by a Central Advisory Council, which had no executive powers.

When the Central Committee came to an end, Hardy's work was taken over by the Home Mission Committee of the Church of Scotland. Following this reorganisation, Hardy made a representation to the Church of Scotland on the miserable conditions under which the Tinkers were living and in response the Church asked Dorothea Maitland to prepare a scheme aimed at bringing about some improvement. Like Hardy, Maitland had a strong background in social welfare and she too had a considerable sympathy for the Tinkers. Maitland had

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<sup>105</sup> Report of the Home Mission Committee to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 1929. NAS: CH1/8/65.

spent sixteen years in police service and was attached to the prison commissioners for Scotland. She believed that while prison was a uniform system for the reduction and reclamation of crime and criminals, there was no uniform treatment for the reduction and reclamation of vagrants. In line with her brief Maitland set out to discover the conditions under which the Tinkers were living and in 1938 told a conference at St Andrews:

...what I found was neglected corners where dirt, squalor, vermin, hopelessness and worse reigned supreme. I feel nothing but shame that we have allowed things to come to such a pass in Scotland.<sup>106</sup>

However, Maitland also warned that with Tinkers and vagrants the main reason for their wandering was 'something in the men themselves'.<sup>107</sup> Similarly, she believed that in some respects the terrible living conditions of the Tinkers were of their own making and, in particular, related to their idleness. She claimed that:

A little civilisation is a dangerous thing, and young tinker men and women have discovered that they can hang around their parent's tents and do absolutely nothing. If there is any hitch, the whole family arrives on the Public Assistance Officers doorstep and, with a wealth of detail, tells him of the imminence of starvation.<sup>108</sup>

Implicit in her observation that the young Tinker men and women had sunk into a state of idleness was the idea that they had in the past been a more industrious people. Maitland failed to consider the changes in the social and economic position of the nomads but wrote of a process of moral degeneration underway among the Tinkers.

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<sup>106</sup>D. Maitland, "The Destitute Wayfarer" Paper to St Andrews Conference, June 1938. p. 1. NAS: HH61/103.

<sup>107</sup>D. Maitland, "The Destitute Wayfarer" Paper to St Andrews Conference, June 1938. p. 14. NAS: HH61/103.

<sup>108</sup>D. Maitland, "The Destitute Wayfarer" Paper to St Andrews Conference, June, 1938. p. 14. NAS: HH61/103.

In addition to obtaining information about the living conditions of the Tinkers in preparing her scheme for their improvement, Maitland also visited Surrey and examined a scheme of camping by permit only in place on Hurtwood Common. The Surrey scheme left a deep impression on her. The scheme was the work of the Hurtwood Control Committee which was founded in 1927. The aim was to limit the numbers of Gypsies camping on Hurtwood Common and to increase the control of the authorities over those who remained in the area. The committee issued permits only to those Gypsy families known in Surrey and permits had to be renewed each month. A ranger who was responsible for issuing the permits patrolled the sites. Permits were to be issued only to those whose behaviour was considered satisfactory.<sup>109</sup> At the time of Maitland's visit in May 1932 there were twenty families in possession of permits camping on the common. She was informed that the nomads valued the licences to camp so highly that many had ceased their nomadic life and remained on the common throughout the year. In addition to the supervised camping ground, a special school had been built to accommodate the children; the decision to build it had stemmed largely from concern over the number of complaints received from local people about the presence of the Gypsy children in the local schools. The Hurtwood School which had been set up by the Surrey Education Committee was regarded as an additional means through which to aid the nomads in their transition to a settled life and particular attention was given to securing sedentary employment for its pupils on leaving the school.

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<sup>109</sup>Cited in D. Maitland, *An Account of Gipsy Camps in Surrey Supervised by Hurtwood Control Committee with Bearing on Tinker Camps in Scotland*, 1932. NAS: HH55/241.

Maitland left Surrey convinced that the provision of supervised camping was the right way forward for the church's work with the Scottish Tinkers. She had found no evidence in Surrey to confirm her fear of a permanent campsite leading to reliance on the Public Assistance, but rather that the Gypsies had remained economically self-sufficient. She was also impressed by the idea of building a new school for the Tinkers and convinced that opposition to Tinkers attending the local schools in Scotland was likely to be just as great as in Surrey. However, Maitland did have one serious reservation about the Surrey scheme. She expressed grave concern over the way in which the committee had restricted camping on the common to only twenty families. Drawing on negative stereotypes of the Gypsies and other groups regarded as primitive, Maitland argued that such restrictions could encourage sexual immorality:

I thought there must be danger ahead in limiting too strictly the numbers of a small community of rather unintelligent people. Inbreeding brings lamentable consequences, moreover, repulsive though incest may appear, it cannot unhappily be disregarded in dealing with people of a rather low type.<sup>110</sup>

In 1933 the Perthshire Scheme prepared by Maitland for the Home Mission was submitted to the Home Mission Committee of the Church of Scotland with the backing of both the Perthshire Education Committee and the County Constabulary.<sup>111</sup> It was more ambitious than the earlier work of the Scottish Churches and influenced by the work of the Hurtwood Control Committee. Its aim was to restrict and regulate vagrancy in the area but, at the same time, to protect the Tinkers and to prevent their being pushed into the slums. Maitland's proposal was clearly an inducement for Tinkers to renounce their nomadic habits. She

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<sup>110</sup> D. Maitland, *An Account of Gipsy Camps in Surrey Supervised by Hurtwood Control Committee with Bearing on Tinker Camps in Scotland*, 1932. NAS: HH55/241.

<sup>111</sup> A. McCormick, "The Tinker Problem" in *JGLS*, 3rd Series, Vol. 12, 1933. pp. 142-147.



proposed that the Tinkers should be provided with permanent camps but supervised by a warden.<sup>112</sup> Furthermore, the scheme included the provision of a separate school for the Tinker children.<sup>113</sup> Maitland's scheme won the financial backing of the Home Mission of the Church of Scotland and the camping scheme began in the winter of 1932-33. John Hamilton was appointed ranger of the camps which he was to inspect for order and cleanliness before issuing or renewing permits. However, by 1934 the scheme had attracted only ten families under supervision on sites scattered throughout the county. Although suitable sites had been located, problems had arisen in encouraging the Tinkers to use them, owing to their fear that the scheme was some kind of hidden trap and, in particular, that their children might be removed under the 1908 Children's Act. However, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland commended the scheme and appears to have been satisfied that successful work was being carried out among the Tinker population.<sup>114</sup>

The Home Mission also agreed to set up the separate school proposed by Maitland and undertook to provide special teaching which they considered would be more suited to the Tinkers than ordinary class work. As a result, in 1938 a new school was opened on the outskirts of Pitlochry in Perthshire, financed by the Girls' Association, which provided £800 for a new corrugated iron building. At the opening ceremony the Rev Dr. White, spoke of the development as an important step in providing the nomads with a fixed centre which would convert their wandering existence into a settled way of life.<sup>115</sup> On the same occasion the Rev Dr. Drummond of Edinburgh, appealed to the local ministers and congregations to encourage

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<sup>112</sup> "Church's Scheme for Perthshire Tinkers" in *Perthshire Constitutional*, 8 Feb 1933.

<sup>113</sup> "Must the Tinker be Tamed?" in *Glasgow News*, 7 Feb 1933.

<sup>114</sup> Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 1933. p. 122. NAS: CH1/9/26.

<sup>115</sup> "Educating Tinker's Children. Church of Scotland Builds School in Perthshire" in *The Scotsman*, 15 Oct 1938.

the assimilation of the Tinkers by getting in touch with the children and their parents at social meetings outside school hours.<sup>116</sup> When Helen Hardy reported on the scheme to the 1934-6 Committee on Vagrancy in Scotland, she maintained that although there had been initial problems, supervised camping would eventually encourage the nomads to settle on a permanent basis.<sup>117</sup>

Even with the scheme in place, the Church of Scotland Home Mission Committee on Tinkers continued to express its concerns that the nomads were deteriorating both morally and racially, with Arthur Harris of the Home Mission telling the 1934-6 Departmental Committee on Vagrancy in Scotland that the ‘...nomads are losing heart, and caste (some now mating with the lowest type of humanity)’.<sup>118</sup> Associates of the Home Mission most notably Dorothea Maitland also continued to call for a central card-indexed register of the Scottish nomads as a means to increase knowledge on the nature and extent of the vagrancy problem.<sup>119</sup> Maitland argued that the numbers of vagrants were increasing and a growing number of Tinkers were being forced to camp out all year round owing to problems in securing suitable winter quarters.<sup>120</sup> Calls for fresh legislation to prevent the letting of degraded and filthy quarters to the nomadic population were also heard. However, no such scheme was ever put into place; it was regarded impractical, in much the same way as was the registration schemes proposed for the English Gypsies. Furthermore, any scheme to

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<sup>116</sup> Educating Tinker’s Children. Church of Scotland Builds School in Perthshire” in *The Scotsman*, 15 Oct 1938.

<sup>117</sup> Statement by Helen Hardy to the 1936 Departmental Committee on Vagrancy in Scotland, 16 Nov 1934. NAS: HH61/84/52.

<sup>118</sup> Written Statement by Arthur Harris member of the Church of Scotland Home Mission to the Tinkers to the 1934-6 Departmental Committee on Vagrancy in Scotland. NAS: HH61/84/51.

<sup>119</sup> D. Maitland, “The Destitute Wayfarer” Paper to St Andrews Conference, June, 1938. p. 14. NAS: HH61/103.

<sup>120</sup> Report to 1934-36 Committee on Vagrancy in Scotland on Byelaws on tents, vans and sheds by the Consultative Committee on Local Health administration. NAS: HH61/95.

prevent nomads taking up slum accommodation in the towns would undoubtedly have caused problems for the group owing to the shortage of better quality housing at affordable rents. However, the importance placed by the Scottish churches on keeping the nomads out of the slums enabled both Hardy's and Maitland's efforts to escape the scorn directed by members of the Gypsy Lore Society, towards many such enterprises. Andrew McCormick of the Society expressed concern that missionary schemes which involved moving the Tinkers into poor quality accommodation in the towns would lead to a process of degeneration occurring among them. However, he commended the plans of the Scottish churches insofar as they were '...designed to prevent the tinkers from mixing with the degraded habitués of slums'.<sup>121</sup>

The major schemes on which the Scottish churches embarked for the reformation of the Tinkers must be regarded as assimilationist. Even where attempts were made to secure permanent camping grounds rather than houses, these tended to be viewed as temporary measures, to be used until more permanent dwelling places could be found. Furthermore, the interest of the missionaries in removing the children from the influence of their parents was also an assimilationist measure. However, in addition to the organised schemes to bring about the settlement of the Tinkers, a significant amount of practical work was carried out by associates of the Scottish churches which was not aimed at their assimilation. In particular, Thomas Wilson who was appointed by the Church of Scotland as the Home Missionary to the Highlands in 1932, a position that he held until 1937, did a significant amount of work among the Tinkers. Although Wilson was not required to conduct a mission, he nevertheless spent much of his spare time among them holding services and visiting the sick. However, the work of people like Hardy was paid for by the churches and, under the scrutiny of these

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<sup>121</sup> A. McCormick, "The Tinker Problem" in *JGLS*, 3rd Series, Vol. 12, 1933. pp. 142-147.

establishments, providing religious instruction and services for nomads took precedence over other forms of social welfare.<sup>122</sup> Indeed, it would seem that all the organised efforts to work among the Tinkers by the Scottish churches were conducted with a view to the conversion of the nomads and ultimately their removal from the roads. However, the work of the Scottish churches remained largely confined to particular areas. Few nomads chose to camp on the permanent sites and few parents agreed to place their children in the care of the missionaries.

### **The New Forest Gypsy Missions**



(10. An unknown missionary photographed among the gypsies of the New Forest in 1895)

In the first decade of the twentieth century, a number of small-scale missionary and charitable groups also remained focused on settling the Gypsies. Of particular interest is the

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<sup>122</sup> See D. Sutherland's report on the work of the Scottish churches in H. Gentleman and s. Swift, *Scotland's Travelling People. Problems and Solutions*, p. 14.

work of two separate organisations among the Gypsies of the New Forest in Hampshire. It has not been possible to trace the records of either of the organisations. However, newspaper reports on the work carried out by the charities and the records of the Gypsy Lore Society suggest that both organisations remained attached to intensively negative stereotypes of the Gypsies and placed a great emphasis on persuading them to give up the nomadic way of life.

The New Forest Gypsy Mission was founded in 1888 as a branch of the Country Towns Mission and worked among the Hampshire Gypsies until 1910. It would seem that its main goal was to encourage the nomads to settle in cottages. However, some evidence suggests that in 1909 it attempted to establish a scheme which involved sending Gypsy children to Canada, where it was believed they would be in a healthier environment.<sup>123</sup> During the early twentieth century a number of charities involved themselves in sending British children considered to be living in a degraded state, abroad. To this end, the British Boards of Guardians sent 934 Poor Law children to Canada in the first six months of 1900 and there were calls for the number of children sent abroad to be increased throughout the first decade of the twentieth century. In 1903, for example, Miss F. Penrose Philp, secretary to the State Children's Association argued that children with '...bad parentage, low physique, degraded relatives, and inherited tendencies to shiftlessness and vagrancy' should be sent to Canada where they could be reformed away from the degrading influences of their parents.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> I have been unable to locate the records of the New Forest Gypsy Mission itself. However, details of the work carried out by the mission are given in Letter from R. A. S. Macfie to unnamed recipient on the subject of evangelical work among the Gypsies of Great Britain, 31 Oct 1911. [SMGC: A26-A30]. For details of sending children to Canada see "Work Among Gipsies" in *The Christian*, June 1909.

<sup>124</sup> F. Penrose Philp, "The Emigration to Canada of Poor Law Children", A Paper Read at the Northern District Poor Law Conference, Hexham, July 1903. London: P. S King and Son, 1903. pp. 6 and 15.

It has not been possible to confirm whether any Gypsy children were actually sent to Canada by the New Forest Gypsy Mission. However, the fact that such a scheme was considered, is illustrative of the extent to which many missionaries, particularly during the early part of the century, continued to be guided by negative ideas about the Gypsies and a belief in the need to separate parent and child.

The New Forest Good Samaritan Charity also worked among the Hampshire Gypsies although this was a social and philanthropic rather than a religious mission. Like the New Forest Gypsy Mission, it was assimilationist in its aspirations for the Gypsies. Founded in October 1897 by Mr Henry E. J. Gibbons, it continued to operate throughout the first decade of the twentieth century. Again, its main aim was to encourage Gypsies to renounce their caravans and to settle in cottages.<sup>125</sup> Gibbons's attitude to the nomadic way of life was laid down in the tenth annual report of the charity in 1908, which was reported widely in the press:

Gipsies have such a dislike to conform to any sanitary or educational laws that their presence in these modern days is not only a nuisance but a disgrace...It is to the public advantage that the gipsy life, only another name for Nomadic thievish tramps, should be made impossible.<sup>126</sup>

Gibbons believed that to such an extent had the Gypsies degenerated and mixed with the wider population, that the Romany language was dead and 'all that gave gipsies the dignity of a separate race has grown obsolete'.<sup>127</sup> It is impossible to assess the impact of these early

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<sup>125</sup> For the history of the New Forest Gypsy Mission see Letter from R. A. S. Macfie to unnamed recipient on the subject of evangelical work among the Gypsies of Great Britain, 31 Oct 1911. [SMGC: A26-A30].

<sup>126</sup> H. E. J. Gibbons, Tenth Annual Report of the New Forest Good Samaritan Charity quoted in "The New Forest Good Samaritan Charity. The Problem of the Gypsies" in *Bournemouth Gazette*, 25 Jan 1908.

<sup>127</sup> H. E. J. Gibbons, in "The New Forest Good Samaritan Charity. The Problem of the Gypsies" in *Bournemouth Gazette*, 25 Jan 1908.

missions to the New Forest Gypsies (although Gibbons claimed to be responsible for persuading eighteen families to forsake the nomadic life and settle in cottages in the first ten years of his work). However, the work is illustrative of the way in which some missionaries continued to be motivated by a detestation of the nomadic way of life.

### **The Church Army and the Hampshire Gypsies**

After the New Forest Gypsy Mission and the New Forest Good Samaritan Charity had faded away, the Church Army, which was already involved in missions to the hop-gardens during the picking season, turned its attention to the Hampshire Gypsies.<sup>128</sup> The beginning of its work in the New Forest marked a departure from the way in which the earlier missions had approached the Gypsies. No longer was the emphasis on encouraging the Gypsies to forsake their nomadic traditions. In fact, it was decided that the Church Army missionary should be posted in a caravan among the Gypsies in the New Forest and in 1925 at the age of twenty-three Captain L. C. C. Langridge of the Church Army was assigned to the Winchester II Gypsy Mission Van in the New Forest. In his memoirs Langridge recalled that much of his time was devoted to offering practical help to the nomads.<sup>129</sup> He wrote of helping a mother to find clothes for a newly born baby and food for herself. However, despite the difference in emphasis of Langridge's work from the previous missionary efforts in the area, the Church Army encouraged the Gypsies to accept the outward signs of the Christian religion. In particular, Langridge remained anxious for nomadic couples to marry legally. He argued that while unmarried they were living in a state of sin. Although he acknowledged that many of the Gypsies lived as couples with children and remained faithful to one another, he placed a

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<sup>128</sup> Lewis (ed), *Old Days in the Kent Hop-Gardens*, p. 33.

<sup>129</sup> Captain L.C.C. Langridge, *Story of Church Army Work in the New Forest and a Double Wedding*, Dec 1972. Unpublished papers of Langridge held at Church Army Headquarters.

great importance on a church wedding. A considerable amount of Langridge's time was devoted to attempts to obtain charitable donations from local residents which could then be put towards the weddings. In one account, Langridge gave a lengthy explanation of the preparations he made on behalf of two Gypsy couples once he had persuaded them to marry. He called on wealthy local people to donate wedding clothes, rings and cakes, clearly important outward symbols of a Christian wedding, but made no mention of the Gypsies themselves actually becoming Christians and accepting the beliefs which the church attached to marriage.

Eventually due to lack of funds the Church Army was obliged to discontinue its work among the Hampshire Gypsies. However, efforts were revived in 1932 when Captain R. Preston Thomas was appointed as permanent missionary to the Gypsies of the New Forest. As was the case with a number of the LCM missionaries, Thomas prided himself on his deep understanding of the Gypsies and their way of life. He considered the nomads to be ignorant in religious matters but suggested that in other respects the culture of the Gypsies was little different from that of sedentary society. In a special interview with the *Hampshire Advertiser and Independent* in 1934 he was reported to have told the interviewer that the Gypsies had no religious beliefs and few customs of their own and that 'rites and ceremonies of any kind are practically non-existent'.<sup>130</sup> Thus despite his claims to an intimate understanding of the Gypsies, either he failed to recognise or to appreciate the validity of their own customs and beliefs. Thomas held a rather patronising perception of the Gypsies as a child-like people, who, lacking the knowledge of God, sought refuge in superstition. He wrote that:

It is a sad thing to realise that there are many gipsies who did not even

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<sup>130</sup> "Among The Forest Gypsies. Life in the Compounds Described. How The Church Army Helps Them" in *Hampshire Advertiser and Independent*, 28 April 1934.



know who Jesus Christ is. These people are reaching out for the 'solid' things in life. There is often a deplorable ignorance of Scripture and consequently many labour under the burden of superstition.<sup>131</sup>

Despite his rather patronising views of the Gypsies as a child-like and unenlightened people, Thomas appears to have taken a very liberal minded view of the nomadic way of life and does not appear to have viewed it as immoral. In fact, he argued that although whole families slept in close proximity, 'immorality is almost unknown'.<sup>132</sup> However, like Langridge, Thomas believed it was important that the Gypsies should be married according to the ways of the Church of England. Although he found that the Gypsies were faithful to one another, although not legally married on occasions when he did succeed in persuading a Gypsy couple to marry legally, he hailed it as proof of his success in raising them above their former state.<sup>133</sup> In 1934 Thomas claimed that he had successfully encouraged nine couples to marry the previous year. Whether or not this was a valid claim, is of little concern to this investigation. What is significant, is that though the missionaries had moved away from encouraging the nomads to give up their existing way of life, they often failed to accept the validity of the Gypsies' own customs and systems of belief. Frequently, the customs of the nomads were taken to be mere superstition and evidence of their primitive nature.

### **Attitudes towards the Gypsy Mission**

Given the widely differing ideas about the Gypsies circulating in British society during the early twentieth century, there can be little surprise that attitudes to the work carried out among the travellers by missionaries also varied significantly. While the efforts of

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<sup>131</sup> *Gipsy Missioning in the New Forest*, p. 1.

<sup>132</sup> *Gipsy Missioning in the New Forest*, p. 4.

<sup>133</sup> *Gipsy Missioning in the New Forest*, p. 11.

missionary organisations attracted some praise for attempting to elevate the Gypsies above their existing state, there was also some strong opposition to the idea of conducting such work among them and evidence to suggest that priests and other religious leaders found the Gypsies as distasteful as did many of their parishioners. In evidence to the Select Committee on Moveable Dwellings, Dr. Henry Morris Chester claimed to have spoken to ministers of the Church of England, Roman Catholic priests and non-conformist ministers on the subject of evangelical work among the Gypsies and asserted that ‘...they all say the same thing - they avoid them, they are so dirty and rough’.<sup>134</sup>

The attitudes of members of the Gypsy Lore Society to the missionary organisations are particularly interesting. The Gypsies had long been portrayed as an irreligious people. Grellmann, for example, had argued that often where the Gypsies did appear to follow particular systems of belief, this was due to a:

...principle inherent in uncivilised people, particularly those of Oriental countries, which occasions them to be strongly attached to their own habits: hence every custom, every conception, which has once been current among them, be it ever so pernicious or ridiculous, is invariably preserved; or any affection which has once predominated in their minds, retains its dominion even for ages.<sup>135</sup>

The work of Grellmann also suggested that the Gypsies could be fickle in matters of religion and it would appear that this assertion also made an impression on members of the Gypsy Lore

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<sup>134</sup> *Report of the Select Committee [HL] on Moveable Dwellings., Minutes of Evidence of Dr Henry Morris Chester.* Para. 903.

<sup>135</sup> Grellmann, H. Grellmann, *Dissertation on Gipsies, being a historical enquiry, concerning the manner of life, economy, customs and conditions of these people in Europe, and their Origin*, (1783) trans Matthew Raper, London, 1787. p. iii.

Society.<sup>136</sup> He had argued that such was the ability of the Gypsies to deceive, that often they would assume a religious identity in order to gain some kind of economic advantage.<sup>137</sup>

In line with Grellmann's thought scholars of the Gypsy Lore Society appeared unwilling to believe that religion could have any genuine significance for the Gypsies. Members advanced a number of different, and sometimes contradictory, explanations as to why certain groups of Gypsies could be found to take on a particular religious identity. At times, religious conformity was dismissed as being simply a means to gain some kind of reward from sedentary society. A number of scholars, for example, claimed that Gypsy parents liked to have their children baptised many times in order to acquire gifts from non-Gypsy godparents. This emphasis is present in Scott Macfie's remark in relation to the German Gypsies who had visited Glasgow in 1906, that the pastor '...willingly added another christening to the half-dozen to which the infants had probably already been subjected in various continental villages and in churches of different denominations'.<sup>138</sup> In this instance it is no surprise that Macfie emphasised the pastor's unwitting co-operation in the Gypsies' trickery. By making this observation he was stressing yet again the inability of the settled society's religious figures to understand the Gypsies.

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<sup>136</sup> *Dissertation on Gipsies*, p. 79. The accusation that the Gypsies adopted religion in order to gain an advantage from sedentary society has a parallel in the history of anti-semitism. Jews have similarly stood accused of claiming to have converted to Christianity in order to deceive. See F. Felsenstien, *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes. A Paradigm of Otherness in English Popular Culture 1660-1830*, London and Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995. pp. 105-106.

<sup>137</sup> Grellmann, *Dissertation on Gipsies*, p. 81.

<sup>138</sup> B. Skot, *A Brief Account of Gypsy History: History, Persecutions, character and customs with Examples of Genuine Gypsy Melodies*, Liverpool: Robert McGee and Co, 1909. pp. 42.50-51.

Elsewhere Macfie preferred to gloss over the accusations of deception which Grellmann levelled at the Gypsies. In one instance he belittled the allegation by arguing that they were simply unable to understand the importance of religious belief and would therefore change their religion to that followed by the society in which they happened to reside:

Religion has no real significance with them; and in eastern Europe they will be christians to-day and mahommedans to-morrow, and have their children both baptised and circumcised, without realising that their conduct is in any way inconsistent.<sup>139</sup>

Macfie also suggested that it was a child-like pleasure in learning about all wonderful things rather than an intention to deceive, which led to the Gypsy's outward acceptance of the religion of the countries in which they moved.<sup>140</sup> Other scholars also appear to have shared this belief. Thus when missionaries claimed to have achieved success in their work amongst the nomads, some writers preferred to interpret the claims as evidence that the Gypsies found some child-like attraction in the words of the preachers. Hence in a lecture on Gypsies to the Warrington Literary and Philosophical Society in 1897 John Sampson, of the Gypsy Lore Society, claimed that:

He enjoys being converted. He undergoes beautiful spiritual experiences at the veriest suggestion. It gratifies his sense of self-importance, and appeals to the emotional side of his nature. This accounts...for the great attraction which the Gypsy race has always had for missionaries and philanthropists like Crabb, Roberts, Hoyland, Baird and Smith, who yet, amid their beautiful anecdotes of reformed and converted Gypsies, reluctantly confess that lapses from them are not infrequent amongst them.<sup>141</sup>

Despite the inconsistencies in Macfie's accounts as to whether the Gypsies adopted religion as

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<sup>139</sup> Skot, *A Brief Account of Gypsy History*, pp. 42.

<sup>140</sup> Skot, *A Brief Account of Gypsy History*, pp. 43.

<sup>141</sup> J. Sampson, *The Gypsies: A Paper read to the Warrington Literary and Philosophical Society*, Mon 15

a means to deceive or because of a child-like pleasure in learning, the implication of the arguments advanced by both Macfie and Sampson was that the work of missionaries among the Gypsies was worthless.

Other members of the Gypsy Lore Society were similarly inclined to argue that religion had no significance for the Gypsies and therefore missionary work had no real value. In fact, scholars could often be extremely contemptuous of philanthropic and religious efforts to reform the Gypsies. David MacRitchie, in particular, expressed a good deal of scorn for the work of missionaries. In describing the efforts of a number of nineteenth century missions to the Gypsies he wrote that ‘...one may smile at the absurdity of their methods and their utter inability to comprehend the nature of the people with whom they are dealing’.<sup>142</sup> In the same article MacRitchie went on to list the failures of missionaries such as Crabb, Baird and the London City Mission. Arthur Symons followed a similar line of argument and, with reference to the work of the New Forest Good Samaritan Charity, argued that not only were they unable to understand the Gypsies but that they were ‘...people who hate them, and would control them, and banish them’.<sup>143</sup> In the case of the assimilationist New Forest Good Samaritan Charity, the tenth annual report of its founder would seem to support Symons’s claims. However, the scorn directed by members of the Gypsy Lore Society towards the Gypsy missionaries was representative of more than simply concern over the welfare of the Gypsies and the assimilationist aspirations of many missionaries; it was also informed by their determination to preserve the Gypsies’ way of life and to safeguard their own authority in the area of Gypsy studies.

Even the Reverend George Hall who became known as the ‘Gypsies’ Parson’

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March 1897, Warrington: Printed for members of the society at the Guardian Office, 1897. p. 8.

<sup>142</sup> MacRitchie, “The Privileges of the Gypsies” p. 322.

<sup>143</sup> A. Symons, “In Praise of Gypsies” in *JGLS*, NS, 1908, Vol. 1. pp. 294-299.

preferred to befriend and study Gypsies without attempting their conversion:

I have not aimed at what some people would call 'reforming them'. I do not wish to see them lose their picturesque habits and lead ordinary drab lives like the rest of us.<sup>144</sup>

On occasion, the resentment expressed by members of the Gypsy Lore Society at the work of the missionaries led them to argue that the missionaries were not working among the 'true' Gypsies at all but the so-called half-breeds of inferior blood. For example, in 1911 Scott Macfie claimed that: 'There is in Great Britain no society which devotes itself to the evangelisation of our 15,000-20,000 Gypsies...British evangelists rather avoid Gypsies and certainly do not seek them out'.<sup>145</sup> In fact, Macfie was well aware that the British and Foreign Bible Society were undertaking the translation of the Gospels into Romani at this time and that the London City Mission Society was working with Gypsies around the metropolis. He also had a good deal of knowledge of the short-term small-scale missions which were being conducted around the country. However, he was strongly of the opinion that only Gypsy scholars were really able to tell the difference between half-breed Gypsies and the real Romany. Thus in reaffirming the unique authority of the GLS to direct matters relating to Gypsies, Macfie questioned the ability of missionaries and philanthropists to gain the trust of 'genuine' Gypsies. In keeping with his belief that missionary work was directed towards half-breeds Macfie referred to the Gypsies of the New Forest Gypsy Mission as a 'mongrel tribe'

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<sup>144</sup> Rev G. Hall, quoted in "The Gipsies' Parson" in *Lloyd's Weekly News*, 1, Feb, 1912. See also G. Hall, *The Gypsy's Parson: His Experiences and Adventures*, London: Sampson and Low, 1916.

<sup>145</sup> Letter from R. A. S. Macfie to unnamed recipient on the subject of evangelical work among the Gypsies of Great Britain, 31 Oct 1911. [SMGC: A26-A30].

and the Gypsies encountered by the London City Mission as ‘not very good representations of their race’.<sup>146</sup>

Even where nomads themselves were conducting missionary work among the Gypsies, their efforts frequently failed to avoid the scorn of the Gypsy Lore Society. Indeed, when the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* referred to the work of the Buckley family, who having been converted by the London City Mission had set out as missionaries themselves in Eastwood, the moral character of those whom they had converted was called into question. T. W. Thompson reported that among the Gypsies in the area ‘...internal disturbances are...rife, even amongst the attendants at Penderbella Buckly’s mission Van (a derelict L.C.C tramcar)’.<sup>147</sup> Macfie claimed similarly that: ‘the ...Eastwood “converted” Gypsies...are a disreputable and quarrelsome tribe of half breeds’.<sup>148</sup> He was also contemptuous of the efforts of the British and Foreign Bible Society to commission Romani translations of the Gospels despite the fact that the translations were aimed at those nomads who had retained a knowledge of the Romani language. However, in this instance he wrote:

I shall encourage the B. and F.B.S. to pursue their idiotic course, as I understand Gypsy Gospels have been found excellent talismans to bring good luck in the most difficult and dangerous swindles.<sup>149</sup>

Thus even when members of the GLS could not dispute the fact that the efforts of missionaries were aimed at those Gypsies considered by their own definitions to be of ‘true’

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<sup>146</sup> Letter from R. A. S. Macfie to unnamed recipient, 31 Oct 1911. [SMGC: A26-A30].

<sup>147</sup> T.W. Thompson, “Affairs of Egypt 1909” in *JGLS*, NS, Vol. 5, 1911. p. 114.

<sup>148</sup> Letter from R. A. S. Macfie to unnamed recipient, 31 Oct 1911. [SMGC: A26-A30].

<sup>149</sup> Letter from R. A. S. Macfie to Augustus John, 7 Nov 1908. [SMGC: A26-A30].

blood, they rarely had anything but disdain for their work.

Attitudes to missionary work among the Gypsies could also vary significantly among members of the sedentary population. It would seem that some who engaged in this work were eccentric and on occasion the work of a missionary could increase suspicion of the Gypsies already felt among the local residents. Such was the case with the Gypsy Gospel Wagon Mission founded in 1892. Among the directors of the mission was the celebrated Gypsy evangelist Rodney Smith as well as several respectable clergymen. The mission was run by Mr J. Wesley Baker who spent several years during the first decade of the early twentieth century following the Gypsies around from place to place seeking an audience. Baker conducted missions to the Gypsies in Blackpool's South Shore, the New Forest and also accompanied them to the fruit farms and strawberry gardens during the fruit-picking season. He claimed to have had a striking degree of success and believed himself to be responsible for many Gypsies turning to Christ.<sup>150</sup> Certainly Algar Boswell was converted by the mission and continued to work as an evangelist in their pay. However, in November 1907 while stationed in Shropshire the group became notorious on account of evidence that their meetings had led to 'speaking with tongues'.<sup>151</sup> The local press reported people losing control during the services, and rolling around the floor speaking in tongues that they previously did not know.<sup>152</sup> It would seem that local villagers became increasingly concerned and attempted to have the meetings stopped. At the same time, the directors of the enterprise also withdrew their support.

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<sup>150</sup> "The Gipsy Gospel Wagon Mission" In *The Methodist Recorder*, 12 Sept 1907.

<sup>151</sup> Letter from R. A. S. Macfie to unnamed recipient, 31 Oct 1911. [SMGC: A26-A30].

<sup>152</sup> "Shropshire Gipsy Missioner's "Pentecost" in *Daily Mirror*, 7 Dec 1907.



There is little evidence of the way in which the nomads themselves viewed the missionaries who worked amongst them. The accounts of many missionaries emphasise the warm reception they received from the Gypsies. Likewise the accounts of those Gypsies converted by the likes of 'Gipsy' Rodney Smith tended to emphasise their gratitude and the evils they had later come to associate with the nomadic way of life.<sup>153</sup> However, one slightly divergent interpretation of the opinion of travellers on the efforts of missionaries is provided by William Smith in an account of the Scottish Tinkers. Though Smith himself appears to have approved of missionary work among the Tinkers, he wrote:

Speaking of Sabbath observance they told me the tinkers were blamed for not attending church but if I only saw the way the gentry carried on in the Highlands with motor cars, bicycles, etc, that day, it would be found such were the greater Sabbath breakers than the poor tinkers from whom much could not be expected.<sup>154</sup>

Such evidence appears to suggest that not only did the nomads feel victimised or 'blamed' by missionaries and others for not attending church, but they also recognised a contradiction in this attitude in light of the declining church attendance among other classes in society.

### **Summary**

Where early twentieth century missionaries to the Gypsies continued to look for the wretchedness depicted in the work of Hoyland, Crabb, Baird and George Smith as they approached the Gypsy camps, they continued to find it. Even those who approached the Gypsy camps without unflattering presuppositions about the nomadic way of life were not averse to exploiting the images employed by earlier scholars when it came to seeking support

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<sup>153</sup> Smith, *His Life and Work by Himself*.

<sup>154</sup> Account by William Smith on the Gypsies of Newark, Sandwick and Orkney transcribed into a notebook containing transcripts of letters and articles begun by T. W. Thompson in 1903. TWTC: MS ENG misc. d. 1190.

for their work. There was still a prevailing belief that those who followed a nomadic way of life were somehow more primitive and more inclined to immorality than was the wider population. The Scottish Churches and the Salvation Army as well as some of the small-scale missions to the Gypsies were motivated chiefly by this distaste for nomadism and so continued to emphasise the importance of assimilation. However, within the LCM and the Church Army there does appear to have been a greater readiness to accept the nomadic way of life during the early twentieth century than there had been in the past. Some of those missionaries who adhered to romantic sentiments about the pure life of the wanderer even chose to take to a nomadic life while they worked among the Gypsies. There was a sense of pride felt by many who claimed to have a unique insight into the lives of the people due to having been accepted as one of them. Yet often the attitudes of missionaries to the Gypsies remained patronising. Throughout their accounts there is evidence of the perception of the Gypsies as a childlike people who needed to be raised out of their state of ignorance. Missionaries also nourished the hope that they could increase conformity among the Gypsies to the norms of the settled Christians. A particular urgency was attached to persuading them to marry in church, which does not always appear to have been coupled by a need for them to accept the value that the church placed on marriage. Even where missionaries accepted romantic ideas about the Gypsy way of life, there was a tendency to disregard the customs and systems of belief of the nomads themselves and assume that these stemmed merely from ignorance of the Christian way of life.

The missionaries recognised the necessity of both moral and financial support for their work from the public. Thus when embarking on a controversial scheme to settle the Gypsies in an area, they sought to anticipate the public mood which in practice often meant keeping the Gypsies as far as possible from the local residents. Furthermore, when responding to the

accusations of crime hurled at their charges, on occasion the missionary would feel compelled to suggest that crimes were committed by 'half-breed' Gypsies who had degenerated from the original stock. They were less inclined to offer explanations as to who exactly was, or was not, a half-breed Gypsy, than were members of the Gypsy Lore Society. Yet there was undoubtedly a conviction among many that there was indeed a degenerate section of the nomadic population and at times this belief was exploited for the purpose of gaining support for their work.

## Chapter Six

### The Gypsy Lore Society



(11. Oliver Lee with Rev F. G. Ackerley, Rev George Hall, William Ferguson and Jas Ferguson. During the early twentieth century members of the Gypsy Lore Society visited numerous Gypsy encampment in the course of their investigations and on occasion attempted to disguise themselves in what they considered to be Gypsy costumes.)

The reactions of members of the Gypsy Lore Society to the ideas of legislators and missionaries have been outlined. Although the Society often stood alone in its opposition to any interference in the Gypsy way of life, the arguments employed by its members reflected ideas which enjoyed a wide circulation. Although few of these Gypsiologists embarked on research into Gypsies during the early twentieth century, those who did made a disproportionate contribution to research on the group. It is in the work of these individuals that the resilience of Gypsy stereotypes and the way in which they drew inspiration from scientific race theory is most graphically illustrated.

The Gypsiologists may not have been deeply familiar with the work of race theorists.<sup>1</sup> However, they were the products of their age. Thus, the academic work conducted in the area testifies to the triumph of the scientific branch of racial thinking in creating an atmosphere in which biological differences and inequalities between the races of man were believed to provide the key to an understanding of physical appearance, language, behaviour, culture and morality.

Members of the Gypsy Lore Society during the early twentieth century continued to be influenced by the idea that the true Romany, whom scholars elevated far above the nomads despised by sedentary society, had long ago begun to disappear from the countryside. Already scholars of the nineteenth century had painted a clear picture of the figure they believed to be the true Gypsy and throughout the early twentieth century academics gradually added layers to the existing criteria of this mythical figure. This investigation must necessarily consider in detail the approach which scholars took to their study of Gypsy culture, character and language. That the Gypsies practised a culture distinct from that of the sedentary population there is little doubt. Indeed, many of the findings of the early twentieth century Gypsy scholars have been confirmed by far more recent study.<sup>2</sup> However, the accuracy of the lorists' findings on issues such as the appearance, dress, the language and culture of the Gypsies is of little importance to this investigation. What is of the utmost

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'Gypsiologist' was used by members of the Gypsy Lore Society to describe their relationship to their subjects of study. The term illustrates the extent to which the scholars had been influenced by the prestige of science and the determination to take scientific methods to their study of the Gypsies.

<sup>2</sup> An examination of Gypsy life and culture in more recent times is provided in J. Okley, *The Traveller-Gypsies*, Cambridge, 1983. See also E.B Trigg, *Gypsy Demons and Divinities: The Magic and Religion of the Gypsies*, New Jersey: Citadel Press, 1973.

significance, however, is the way in which aspects of Gypsy life and culture were consistently projected through the lens of racial science.

### **The Early Twentieth Century Gypsy Lore Society**

During the early twentieth century numerous studies of Gypsies were carried out by members of the Gypsy Lore Society. The dawning of the new century had witnessed a revival in the Society's activities and it re-formed officially in 1907. This was not heralded as the beginning of a new epoch in British Gypsy studies as, in the words of MacRitchie, the work of the Society had not ceased in 1892 but merely fallen 'into a trance'.<sup>3</sup> The Gypsy Lore Society revived with much the same focus as before and David MacRitchie became the its new president. He, along with John Sampson, first librarian of Liverpool University, persuaded Scott Macfie to revive the Society and act as its editor and general secretary. The choice of Macfie proved well calculated for as head of a firm of sugar refiners in Liverpool, he had ample means to revive the Society; the journal was enlarged and also included illustrations for the first time. Macfie showed himself to have 'boundless energy and wide interests' and had soon learned to speak Romani as well as writing numerous articles on Gypsy life and customs.<sup>4</sup>

In MacRitchie's prefatory note to the new journal it was announced that the Society was to be 'more vigorous than ever' 'devoting itself with renewed energy to

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<sup>3</sup> D. MacRitchie, "Prefatory Note" in *JGLS*, New Series, Vol. 1, No 1, July 1907.

<sup>4</sup> D. Yates, *My Gypsy Days: Recollections of a Romany Rawnie*, London, 1951, p. 161

Gypsy study in all its various phases'.<sup>5</sup> The aim of continuing the work of the original Society was stressed in a circular sent out by Macfie in an effort to recruit members. It was proposed that the 'high standard of scholarship' should be maintained by confining the publications in the new journal to 'articles of real interest and permanent value on the Philology, Ethnology and Folk-Lore of the Gypsy Race, written by the chief authorities in these subjects'. Occasional papers embracing a wider field such as the 'secret languages, cant and slang and especially 'shelta' were to be accorded a subordinate place.<sup>6</sup>

The membership of the Society had undergone a change since its original founding in 1888. A number of prominent figures in the original Society such as C. G. Leland and F. H. Groome had died in the interim. Yet with Macfie's efforts, the membership of the Society doubled in the first few years and its respectability was bolstered by the support of a number of prominent individuals including J. H. Yoxall M.P and also Augustus John, the artist. Thus, although it remained small, the Society increased in influence as well as size. There was also a good deal of continuation from the membership of the earlier Society. Hence the membership list for 1907 included 22 individuals who had been involved with it during the first period.<sup>7</sup> Macfie also had the support of three of the founder members of the original Society in MacRitchie, Sampson and T. H. Crofton. There was therefore little change in outlook and

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<sup>5</sup>D. MacRitchie, "Prefatory Note"

<sup>6</sup> Letter from R.A.S Macfie to J.H. Yoxall MP 19 April 1907. [SMGC: A26-A30].

<sup>7</sup> H. Francis "Dora Yates and the Gypsy Lore Society" in *JGLS*, Series 3, Vol. XXXIX, No 1-2, 1960, pp. 6-11. E. Bradburn, *Dr Dora Yates: an appreciation*, Liverpool: University of Liverpool, 1975.

approach. Sampson, for example, continued his work on Gypsy languages and actively encouraged an interest in Gypsies among Liverpool students, most notably Dora Yates, who became an assistant editor of the journal.<sup>8</sup>

The romantic image of the Gypsy continued to capture the imagination of members of the Gypsy Lore Society. Indeed, in her memoirs Dora Yates wrote that in almost all cases, an individual's interest in Gypsies was the result of reading the works of George Borrow.<sup>9</sup> The writings of John Sampson in particular illustrate the continuing appreciation of the image of the Gypsy projected in the work of Borrow. Sampson was known around the University of Liverpool as the 'Rai of Rais' and was at heart a poet with a deep sentimental attachment to the romantic image of the Gypsy. He had a passionate interest in Gypsy music and folk tales as well as conducting more academic research into Gypsy dialects and sayings.<sup>10</sup>

The Gypsy Lore Society was obliged to disband for a second time in 1914 with the outbreak of the First World War when Scott Macfie went on military service. It was hoped that the Society would be resuscitated within a few years and activity was resumed in 1921 when William Ferguson, who was to become the new president (1922-27) financed its rebirth. However, strict economic conditions obliged the

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<sup>8</sup>A somewhat partial account of the work of John Sampson is provided in his grandson A. Sampson's, *The Scholar Gypsy- The Quest for a Family Secret*, London: Murray, 1997.

<sup>9</sup> Yates, *My Gypsy Days*, p. 11. In 1909 T. W. Thompson wrote an article illustrating his appreciation for Borrow's Gypsies. See T. Thompson, "Borrow's Gypsies" in *JGLS*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Series, Vol. 3. 1909- 1910. pp. 164-174.

<sup>10</sup> See J. Sampson, *The Dialect of the Gypsies of Wales*, 1926. "A Hundred Romany Sayings" in *JGLS*, NS, Vol. 1, July 1908, pp. 272-277. "Tinkers and their Talk" in *JGLS*, Vol. 2, 1891, pp. 272-277. *Welsh Gypsy Folk Tale*, Grenyggog Press, 1933.



journal to be cut by half its size and illustrations became an occasional luxury. After the death of Sampson in 1931, Macfie resumed the editorship on an unofficial basis with Yates dealing with the heavy load of Society correspondence.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Myth of the 'Romany Rye'**

It would be erroneous to consider the Gypsy Lore Society as a wholly uniform body of scholars in pursuit of a single goal. Members were drawn from various walks of life, were of very different character, and pursued their interest in the Gypsies along different paths. However, a number of themes can be detected in their perceptions and approaches to Gypsy life.

The continuity between the nineteenth and early twentieth century Gypsy Lore Society was not limited to the topics of study or methods of investigation. The persistence of Gypsy stereotypes was such that it shaped the way in which scholars perceived their own relationship to the group. The image of the Gypsies as an elusive race, anxious not to disclose their closely guarded secrets remained strong during the early twentieth century. Thus, like Borrow before them, members of the Society were under pressure to explain their ability to obtain information from such a people in order to be accepted as authorities in the field. A number of the scholars of the early twentieth century Society appear to have been particularly anxious to explain how they had come to win the confidence of this mysterious people. Thus the myth lingered of the Romany Rye, or Gypsy gentleman, who was the only non-Gypsy to be accepted by the Romanies. Scholars took great pride in their status and in one of his lectures at

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<sup>11</sup> Yates, *My Gypsy Days*, pp. 167-169.

Liverpool Sampson revealed that 'we rate it as fair a thing to be a Romano Rye as others a poet or a Christian'.<sup>12</sup>

A pattern can be detected, therefore, whereby members of the Society strove to prove that they were real Romany Ryes by claiming that they had either some strain of 'Gypsy blood' or an intimacy with a particular tribe of Gypsies among whom they walked as a brother. The Reverend George Hall was said to know many Gypsies and was reported to have claimed that:

There are signs by which the Gipsy will always recognise one who knows them and has lived among them.<sup>13</sup>

Other Society members were also anxious to explain their close connections. In her autobiography Yates placed great emphasis on her close relationship with true Romanies, even suggesting that the Gypsies of a particular tribe would be very possessive of 'their special Rye or Rawnie' and resent their associating with other Gypsies.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Society member Dorothy Una Ratcliffe was said to be extremely 'proud to have Romany blood in her veins'.<sup>15</sup> Ratcliffe's three-act play *Gypsy Doreilia* related the particulars of her claim to Gypsy ancestry through a single great-grandparent. However, Ratcliffe appears to have failed to grasp the contradiction in her pride in being able to claim some strain of Gypsy blood while her colleagues of the Gypsy Lore Society denounced those of mixed blood as a degenerate and troublesome

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<sup>12</sup> Yates, *My Gypsy Days*, p. 12.

<sup>13</sup> Rev G. Hall quoted in "The Gipsies Parson" in *Lloyd's Weekly News*, 1 February 1914.

<sup>14</sup> Yates, *My Gypsy Days*, p. 38.

<sup>15</sup> Anon, "Dorothy Una Ratcliffe" in *Border Magazine* August 1934, Vol. 39, No. 464.

people.<sup>16</sup> A further, and quite ridiculous, claim on Gypsy ancestry was made by Augustus John who became the Society's president in 1937. In 1946 he was reported to have told an interviewer for *The Times* that his mother's name had been Augusta Petulengro (a name, meaning blacksmith, which was acknowledged by lorists as one of a true Romany tribe). In a letter to John Rothenstein in May 1952 he made the even bolder claim that:

As for Gypsies. I have not yet encountered a sounder Gypsy than myself. My mother's name was Augusta Petulengro, remember and we descended from Tubal-Cain via Paracelsus.<sup>17</sup>

A glance at Holroyd's biography of John shows this claim to be an utter fabrication, but it became a matter of common belief that Augustus John was indeed a Gypsy. John appears to have delighted in this new found identity; he took lessons in Romani from John Sampson and endeavoured to express his Gypsy character through his lifestyle, manner and dress. He adhered closely to the romantic stereotype which he interpreted as a symbol of liberty, independence and sexual licence. In keeping with his interest John painted a number of Gypsy scenes including portraits of his mistress Dorothy McNeill, who was not of Gypsy ancestry, but whom he suggested was a Gypsy girl named Doreilia Boswell.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> D.U. Ratcliffe, *Gypsy Doreilia: A Story-Play in Three Acts*, Bodley Head Lane, 1932.

<sup>17</sup> Cited in M. Holroyd, *Augustus John, Vol. 1: The Years of Innocence*, London: Book Club Associates, 1975, p. 32.

<sup>18</sup> Holroyd, *Augustus John, Vol. 1*, p. 147.

The myth of the Romany Rye was more than merely the means through which the scholars asserted their academic authority. Many of the Society's members had a deep appreciation for the outdoor life and appear to have genuinely felt that they possessed a mysterious affinity with the romantic wanderer, and a unique understanding of their need to roam. Such was the extent of Macfie's vision of himself as being akin with the Gypsies, that he had great expectations of his time spent amongst them. On occasion this feeling led Macfie to disappointment. In one instance, having spent only two days travelling with a group of Gypsies in Bulgaria he became overwhelmed by a feeling of failure to become as one with his companions:

...I awoke at dawn feeling much depressed. My journey seemed a failure; I was learning nothing, and I was not even a spectator of the normal life of the comb-makers. We travelled so rapidly that conversation was impossible; and when we halted, fatigue prohibited any serious attempt at inquiry or investigation. The excursion was costly; I was not even enjoying myself.<sup>19</sup>

Not only did the myth of the Romany Rye lead scholars to consider themselves inadequate where they were not successfully able to befriend a particular group of Gypsies, it also had repercussions for their relationships with one another. The idea of the Romany Rye intensified feelings of professional jealousy among some scholars. Such jealousy had been a trait of earlier Gypsy scholars and Leland had felt that the Gypsy Lore Society would have been established eighteen years earlier had it not been for intense rivalry between scholars in the field.<sup>20</sup> This professional jealousy seemed to feed off the stereotype of the Gypsies as an elusive people and the image of the

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<sup>19</sup> Andreas, *With Gypsies in Bulgaria*, Liverpool: Henry Young and Sons, 1916. p. 75.

<sup>20</sup> See C. Leland Letter to MacRitchie, Feb 26, 1888, cited in Elizabeth Robins Pennell, *Charles Godfrey Leland: A Biography*, Vol. 1, London: Archibald Constable and Co., 1906, p. 198.

Romany Rye as a rarity with special qualities. There was pressure on the lorists, for example, to prove that their connections with the Gypsies were deeper and somehow more real than those of their peers. In an article for *Cassell's Magazine* W. A. Dutt went into significant detail to explain the way in which his 'true' Gypsies laughed at lorists who seemed to make a hobby out of Gypsy lives and customs. He argued it was very rare indeed that a non-Gypsy was genuinely accepted as the 'true pal' of the Romanies.<sup>21</sup> In the same article, however, he emphasised his own intimacy with the Gypsies, claiming that one of his Gypsy friends had shared a joke with him at the expense of other lorists. Macfie, for his part, made the struggle for intimacy with Gypsies into an academic issue by arguing that, 'Romani is the passport to the confidence of these wild children of nature'.<sup>22</sup> Numerous scholars attempted to reaffirm the romantic stereotype of a mysterious and secretive race and speculated as to the willingness of the Gypsies to initiate only an elite few non-Gypsies into their mysterious culture. MacRitchie, taking his evidence from Grellmann and Borrow, even suggested that some tribes preferred to elect a non-Gypsy leader.<sup>23</sup>

All scholars agreed that to win the confidence of the Gypsies required something that the ordinary public did not possess. Thus when in 1912, T. W. Searle launched the new Gypsy and Folklore Club with the object of promoting '..fellowship among those interested in Gypsies and Gypsies themselves' and 'to encourage study

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<sup>21</sup> W. Dutt, "English Gypsies: An Interesting Article Describing the Habits and Customs of the Dwellers in the "Tents of Egypt" in *Cassells Magazine*, 1911.

<sup>22</sup> R.A.S. Macfie "Gypsy Lore", in *The University Review*, November 1908. p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> D. MacRitchie, "Gypsy Nobles" in *JGLS*, NS, Vol. 1, Oct 1907, No 2, p. 98-111.

of, and conversation in, the Romani language' the exclusive nature of the group was made clear from the outset.<sup>24</sup> Although members of the Gypsy Lore Society would automatically be granted membership to the club, other applicants would be required to sit an examination to test their knowledge of the Gypsy race. Initially many members of the Gypsy Lore Society showed an interest in the club, which was opened by Elizabeth Robins Pennell, the niece of C. G. Leland.<sup>25</sup> However, it soon became apparent that the quality of the new club's journal, *Romanitshels, Didakais and Folk-Lore Gazette*, was suspect. For example it re-printed articles from the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, without permission. Furthermore, the financial dealings of its founder were questionable. As a result, members of the Gypsy Lore Society became anxious to disassociate themselves from the new club for fear of the GLS being tainted by association.

The continual need to prove that they possessed the necessary qualities to be accepted by any group of 'genuine' Gypsies undoubtedly affected the work of many academics during the early twentieth century. For example, it would seem that all the Gypsies who gave the scholars a warm reception were declared to be Romanies 'from ancient pure blooded stock'.<sup>26</sup> Shortly after the scholars had befriended the tribe, it would be recorded that the Gypsies had proved their purity of blood by expressing

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<sup>24</sup> "The Gypsy and Folk-Lore Club" in *The Star*, 17 Jan 1912. And also "To Study the Ways of the Romany: Opening of Gypsy and Folk-Lore Club" in *The Morning Leader*, 16 Jan 1912. See also T. Searle, *The Gypsy Folklore Club*, Printed Privately for members by Bristol: Purnell and Sons, 1912.

<sup>25</sup> *Romanitshels, Didakais and Folk-Lore Gazette*, Vol. 1, No 1, Jan 1912, p. 7-8.

<sup>26</sup> Yates, *My Gypsy Days*, p. 17.

how they ‘...despise the *posh* and *posh* (half and half) blooded Gypsies’.<sup>27</sup> In instances where scholars felt they had not been well received by a group of Gypsies, it would often be discovered that these people were not in fact Gypsies at all but half-breeds of inferior blood. Scholars acted under the somewhat arrogant assumption that a ‘true’ Gypsy of pure blood would recognise a Romany Rye for his unique understanding of the true Romanies and on this account would treat him as an equal. Therefore, while it was accepted that even the pure Romanies would beg money from the ordinary public, when one of the scholars was pestered by begging the culprit would often be declared a half-breed. In describing his personal experience of the German Gypsies who arrived in Scotland in 1906 and were reported to have begged persistently for money, Andrew McCormick was quick to point out that ‘most of them were *didakais*’.<sup>28</sup>

### **A Quest for the ‘True’ Gypsy**

Those who investigated human races during the nineteenth and early twentieth century attempted to employ quantitative research methods to isolate the defining characteristics of the race, which could then be used for the classification of individuals. Investigators of the Gypsies shared this belief. From the beginning the Gypsy Lore Society had regarded itself as a group of ‘Gypsy scientists’, a belief reflected by members’ use of the term ‘Gypsiologist’.<sup>29</sup> Both Groome and Leland, for

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<sup>27</sup> A. McCormick, *The Tinkler Gypsies*, Dumfries: J. Maxwell and Son, 1907, p. 465.

<sup>28</sup> A. McCormick, *The Tinkler Gypsies*, p. 263.

<sup>29</sup> J. Sampson, “The Gypsies” *A Paper read to the Warrington Literary and Philosophical Society*, 15 March, 1897. Printed privately for the society by Warrington: Guardian Office, p. 10.

example, had favoured scientific methods and, faithful to their beliefs, the new series of the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* advocated taking the study of Gypsies out to their encampment. Details of the whereabouts of particular encampments were given and members would invade the sites such as that of the Hungarian Coppersmiths in Birkenhead in 1911 and those of the Greek Gypsies who travelled through Britain between 1929 and 1940. On these expeditions they often went disguised in 'Gypsy dress'.<sup>30</sup>

The aim of members of the Gypsy Lore Society was to investigate and record the characteristics of the Gypsies before they became indistinguishable from the sedentary population. Although they considered that this process of degeneration was already well underway they aimed to isolate the characteristics of the ideal type. Thus a great deal of time and effort was put into recording the physical characteristics, vocabularies, customs and folk-lore of the group and drawing up Gypsy pedigrees.<sup>31</sup> The dominant interest of members of the Society was with those Gypsies they considered to be pure Romany. However, the increase in number of scholars who assumed an interest in Gypsies did lead to some changes in the way in which the nomadic hierarchy was believed to be made up. It has been suggested already that all Gypsiologists strove to illustrate that they enjoyed regular contact with the true Gypsies during their investigations. This interest of the lorists in proving their

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<sup>30</sup> "Notes and Queries" in *JGLS*, NS, Vol. 1, No 1, July 1907, pp. 77-82. See also D. Yates "The 'Greek' Nomad Gypsies in Britain 1929-1940" in *JGLS*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. XXI. 1942. pp. 87-110.

<sup>31</sup> For an example of Gypsy pedigrees see W. Rivers, "Notes on the Heron Pedigree Collected by the Rev G Hall" in *JGLS*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Series, Vol. 7. 1913. A further preoccupation of members of the Gypsy Lore Society was with vocabularies. Through examining the language of the Gypsies



intimacy with these Gypsies had to be reconciled, of course, with the theory that pure Gypsies were dying out. The result was an increase in the different groups of travellers who were considered, by way of their descent, to have some admirable characteristics.

As was the case during the nineteenth century, it was considered that the pure Romany resided at the very top of the nomadic hierarchy. Yet now other groups of travellers began to come to the attention of scholars. In 1890 an article in the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* by John Sampson expressed the view that the Tinker was also ‘...undoubtedly a good fellow, and worth knowing’ and that there could be no impropriety in ‘further cultivating his acquaintance’.<sup>32</sup> Sampson also argued that the discovery made by C. G. Leland of a language, so secret that even Borrow had failed to recognise it, in use among the Tinkers proved that they too were a distinct people with particular hereditary characteristics.<sup>33</sup> The same emphasis appeared in the Society’s journal in 1907 in an article which Leland had written before his death in 1903, in which he presented the view that Tinkers were also a distinct race from the British public and from the rest of the nomadic population:

The Tinker fraternity of Great Britain existed with perhaps all its characteristics, as did that of the Gypsies, unbroken and little mixed with foreign blood, until the advent of the railroads, or about 1845.<sup>34</sup>

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scholars speculated about their origins and early wanderings. See Sampson, J., “Gypsy Language and Origin” in *JGLS*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Series, Vol. 1. 1907-1908. pp. 4-23.

<sup>32</sup> Sampson, “Tinkers and their Talk” pp. 204.

<sup>33</sup> Sampson, “Tinkers and their Talk” pp. 204 and 220.

<sup>34</sup>C. Leland, “The Tinkers” in *JGLS*, NS, Vol. 1, No 1, (pp 77-82), p. 76.

Leland expressed the belief that the discovery of a secret language still in use among the Tinkers meant that, like the Romanies, they were ‘...a class so separate as almost to form a race’.<sup>35</sup> He reported that like the Romany Gypsies, the Tinkers in many areas continued to adhere to their own closely guarded habits and customs.<sup>36</sup> The view was also put forward that like the English and Welsh Gypsies, the Tinkers were disappearing.<sup>37</sup> Sampson argued that already many of the Tinker group to be found in England were in fact half-breeds whose language had become corrupted. However, it was considered that their contemporaries in Ireland and Scotland had remained distinct castes and retained a knowledge of their own language.<sup>38</sup>

Sampson and Leland attempted to win the respect of scholars for the Tinkers by emphasising their similarities to the English and Welsh Gypsies. So did the work of Andrew McCormick, for example, on the culture and appearance of a nomadic group of Dumfries and Galloway whom he termed ‘Tinkler-Gypsies’, when he attempted to prove that these people possessed a strong strain of ‘Gypsy blood’ in their veins.<sup>39</sup> It would seem that in order for their work to be considered a valuable contribution to the field scholars would have to illustrate the striking degree to which the subjects of their

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<sup>35</sup> Leland, “The Tinkers”, p. 76.

<sup>36</sup> Leland, “The Tinkers”, p. 76.

<sup>37</sup> Sampson, “Tinkers and their Talk” pp. 220.

<sup>38</sup> Sampson, “Tinkers and their Talk” pp. 205-206.

<sup>39</sup> McCormick, *The Tinkler Gypsies*, p. xi.

study, be they Tinkers, Gypsies or others, conformed to romantic images of wandering tribes.

Other scholars were far more sceptical about the existence of other distinct and admirable races within the travelling population. To scholars such as Dutt, only the pure-blooded Romany could be a worthy subject of study; other nomads could not be defined as distinct races in themselves, but only as ‘half-bloods’, ‘quarter-bloods’ and ‘octoroons, duodecaroons and vigintiroons’ in relation to how far they were removed from the ‘true Romanichels’.<sup>40</sup>

Even Sampson who has been understood to represent a departure from earlier approaches to the study of Gypsies adhered to the belief in a racial hierarchy of travellers.<sup>41</sup> Sampson never felt inclined to draw up the lists of Gypsy pedigrees which so preoccupied his colleagues and likewise tended to be less arbitrary in his employment of terms such as ‘didakais’ and ‘mumper’ to describe those who fell short of the romantic image. However, this is not to say that he questioned the view that there existed a true Gypsy identity, but rather that he left the drawing up of hierarchies and genealogical research to others. In his introduction to McCormick’s *The Tinkler Gypsies*, he demonstrated his acceptance of the existence of a hierarchy within the travelling population and merely wondered at the place of the Tinkler-Gypsy within it:<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> W. Dutt “At Home with Gipsies” in *TP’s Weekly*, 11 Feb 1910.

<sup>41</sup> T. Acton, *Gypsy Politics and Social Change*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974. p. 89.

<sup>42</sup> J. Sampson introduction to McCormick, *The Tinkler Gypsies*, p. x-xvi.

Yes Gypsies are Gypsies, but are the Tinkler-Gypsies Romané? That is the question. And if so where about in the hierarchy of the Romani race should we place them?<sup>43</sup>

Thus ideas of race and hierarchy remained fundamental to the approach of the Gypsy Lore Society and were taken to almost every area of study. To a significant degree the investigations conducted by members were geared towards aiding the classification of Gypsy individuals and distinguishing between the racial pures and those who had degenerated from this inner circle. While the Romany continued to be granted an elite status, those travellers who fell short of the romantic images were declared 'half-breeds', 'Didikais', 'Mumpers' or 'Poshrats' and were almost invariably viewed with contempt.

In reality, the efforts of scholars to isolate the characteristics of the genuine Gypsy race amounted to a search for a mythical Gypsy who embodied all the qualities of the romantic stereotype. Indeed, the signs that scholars considered to be evidence that a particular nomad was of the true Gypsy race were not markedly different from the romantic images of Gypsies.<sup>44</sup> In many fictional accounts, as well as in the work of early scholars, the physical appearance of the Gypsy was presented as a means through which they could be distinguished from members of the sedentary population.<sup>45</sup> Likewise, in their scholarly investigations members of the Gypsy Lore

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<sup>43</sup> J. Sampson introduction to McCormick, *The Tinkler Gypsies*, p. xi.

<sup>44</sup> Romantic representations of Gypsies in early twentieth century society are explored in chapter two of this thesis.

<sup>45</sup> H. Grellmann, *Dissertation on Gipsies, being a historical enquiry, concerning the manner of life, economy, customs and conditions of these people in Europe, and their Origin*, (1783) trans Matthew Raper, London, 1787. p. viii. W. H. Hudson, *A Shepard's Life. Impressions of the South Wiltshire Downs*, London: Methuen, 1910. p. 305.

Society adhered to the idea of the true Gypsy as a distinct physical type. In Macfie's case, taking his evidence from earlier academics such as Grellmann, as well as his own observations, he declared that:

The race is dolichocephalic, or long-headed, and the average height is 5 ft. 4.9 ins. Their limbs are wiry, their movements vivacious, and their hands and feet small. Their features are regular and in youth often extremely beautiful: the mouth small, the teeth good and white, and the nose straight, with a slight tendency to be hooked. They are deeply pigmented, the skin of pure Gypsies being olive, or even darker, and the hair straight and black, with the peculiar blackness which is described as 'blue-black'. The iris is dark, especially among the women, and the eyes have a lustre which everybody notices and nobody has yet succeeded in describing.<sup>46</sup>

The extent to which particular groups of Gypsies displayed these physical characteristics was regarded by such scholars as an indication of their purity of blood. This process is particularly well illustrated in an account written by Andrew McCormick, who, on encountering a Gypsy with a particularly dark complexion, remarked that, 'Gypsy blood was easily diagnosed'.<sup>47</sup> He was convinced that interbreeding between Gypsies and non-Gypsies had led to a process of racial degeneration among the Tinkler-Gypsies of Galloway and argued that in the case of Gypsies who had interbred with the house-dwelling population:

At first there were as off-spring some splendid physical types with wild and mixed racial characteristics, but the type has steadily deteriorated.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>B. Skot, *A Brief Account of Gypsy History, Persecutions, Character and Customs with Examples of Genuine Gypsy Melodies*, Liverpool: Robert McGee, 1909. p. 36.

<sup>47</sup> McCormick, *The Tinkler-Gypsies*, p. 329.

<sup>48</sup> McCormick, *The Tinkler-Gypsies*, p. 417.

On occasions where the scholars encountered Gypsies who did not conform to the ideal type, they often turned to theories of racial degeneration to explain such discrepancies. Invariably, where scholars wrote of the physical appearance of the genuine Gypsy, they emphasised a robust, healthy and extremely attractive physique. By contrast, however, adjectives used in accounts of the so-called half-breeds were highly unflattering. In one description of a group of Gypsies considered to be half-breeds, George Hall wrote that ‘...one can scarcely distinguish them from the Cockney ‘raff’ of the East-End of London. They generally possess red or brown hair, snub noses and blue-eyes’.<sup>49</sup>

The language of the nomads was also of great interest to members of the Gypsy Lore Society. The belief that Gypsies and Tinkers had an ‘...ingrained aversion to giving information about their language’ held strong throughout the early twentieth century.<sup>50</sup> Therefore those who studied the Romani language considered it to be a ‘...philological romance’.<sup>51</sup> During the nineteenth century philologists had delighted in the discovery of Greek and Slavonic words in the Romani language and drew on them as evidence of the path the Gypsies must have taken from their original homeland, believed to be India, towards western Europe.<sup>52</sup> However, when it came to

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<sup>49</sup> Rev G. Hall, “The Gipsies of England”[SMGC: C-4-11 (4)] p. 416.

<sup>50</sup> McCormick, *The Tinkler-Gypsies*, p. 305.

<sup>51</sup> T. Thompson “Gipsies: An Account of their Character, Mode of Life, Folk-Lore, and Language”, p. 52. [SMGC: C-4-11 (3)].

<sup>52</sup> A number of seventeenth century scholars speculated on the origin of the Gypsies by way of reference to their language and were noted by the philologist A. Pott, *Die Zigeuner in Europa und Asien*. In the area of language Pott was considered by Sampson to have ‘...laid the foundations of Gypsy scholarship’. See J. Sampson, “On the Origin and Early Migrations of the Gypsies” a paper

identifying English words within the dialects of British Gypsies, scholars took the discovery as evidence that the language of the people was becoming increasingly corrupt and would soon disappear altogether. Or, as Macfie expressed it 'Romani has the antique beauty of a crumbling ruin...in various stages of decay, succumbing gradually to different forces...overwhelmed by the infiltration of alien words'.<sup>53</sup> The intermarriage of Gypsies with non-Gypsies and the giving up on the nomadic way of life were considered to be the chief factors that led to the decline in the language of British Gypsies. Hence T. W. Thompson wrote that as a consequence of such intermarriages 'In three or four generations the racial characteristics and language have been lost, and the mongrel descendants...inspire nothing but disgust'.<sup>54</sup> The idea that a true Gypsy could be identified through an examination of his language had been evident in the work of earlier scholars. Indeed, Groome had considered language to be '...the primary test of Gipsydom'.<sup>55</sup> In tune with this idea, some members of the early twentieth century Gypsy Lore Society appear to have believed that the language was one of the means through which the extent of blood purity of particular Gypsies could be determined. Consequently, when describing Gypsies in the South of England, the Rev George Hall claimed that their status as 'half-castes' was confirmed by the fact that 'they speak in very corrupt Romany'.<sup>56</sup>

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read before the Anthropological Section of the British Society, 17 Sept 1923. [SMGC: E-1-102 (5)]. p. 159.

<sup>53</sup> Skot, *A Brief Account of Gypsy History*, p. 44.

<sup>54</sup> T. Thompson, "Gipsies: An Account of their Character, Mode of Life, Folk-Lore, and Language", p. 48. See also T. Thompson, "Gypsy Marriage in England" in *JGLS*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, Vol. 6. 1927, pp. 101-129.

<sup>55</sup> F. Groome, *The Gipsies; Reminiscences and Social Life of this Extraordinary Race*, Edinburgh, 1881, p. 250.

<sup>56</sup> Rev G. Hall, "The Gipsies of England"[SMGC: C-4-11 (4)], p. 416.

There were also a number of personality and behavioural traits said to be characteristic of the true Gypsy. Perhaps surprisingly many of the qualities which members of the Gypsy Lore Society looked for in the Gypsies had been evident in the antipathetic account of the nomads presented by Grellmann.<sup>57</sup> The more extreme accusations made by the scholar, such as cannibalism and child snatching, tended to be ignored by members of the Gypsy Lore Society who were more attached to romantic images of the Gypsies. However, in other important respects the Gypsiologists adhered to Grellmann's stereotypical portrait. John Sampson for example, accepted unquestioningly some of the assertions of earlier scholars and wrote of how carrion pork remained a great delicacy among the Gypsies.<sup>58</sup> Other scholars attempted to investigate the way in which Gypsies could kill farm animals, beg and eat the carcasses without posing any danger to their own health. It was suggested that a pure form of the mineral Barium Carbonate was used in this process and Macfie even joked about the possibility of risking '...the death of a pig or two in the interests of Gypsy science'.<sup>59</sup>

Evidence of Grellmann's claims that the Gypsies were a primitive people, less developed than any other member of the human race, can also be found in the work of the early twentieth century scholars. Indeed, Arthur Symons asserted that the

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<sup>57</sup> H. Grellmann, *Dissertation on Gipsies*,

<sup>58</sup> Sampson, "On the Origin and Early Migrations of the Gypsies"

<sup>59</sup> Letter from R.A.S. Macfie to Lady A. Grosvenor, 7 Oct 1908. [SMGC: A26-A30]. Barium Carbonate is a white mineral. In Britain this mineral is usually found in caves particularly in Cumberland and Durham.



‘...Gypsies are nearer to the animals than any race known to us in Europe’.<sup>60</sup> Similarly Macfie referred to the Gypsies as ‘ill-organised’ and ‘a race of semi-savages’.<sup>61</sup> On the whole, however, members of the Gypsy Lore Society preferred to project the Gypsies in a more romantic light than that found in the work of Grellmann. Thus, the primitive nature and animal-like characteristics which scholars still took to be characteristic of the Gypsies were projected as endearing qualities. Accusations of savagery and low mental capacity, for example were re-cast in the work of T. W. Thompson as a sign that ‘...the Gypsies never grow up, but always remain mentally, morally and emotionally children’.<sup>62</sup>

One of the chief qualities considered to be characteristic of the Gypsies was an ingrained wanderlust. The work of Grellmann had suggested that the Gypsies’ need to roam was grounded in nature and, faithful to this belief, Macfie rejected any suggestion that the Gypsies’ wandering could be due to any reasons of employment, habit or tradition. To him there was only one reason for it: ‘He wanders simply because he cannot help it’.<sup>63</sup> Other scholars remarked similarly that travelling was determined by the Gypsies’ biological inheritance. For example, in a lecture to the Genealogical Society, C. P. Hawkes, argued that whilst true-blooded Romanies could

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<sup>60</sup> A. Symons, “In Praise of Gypsies” in *JGLS*, NS, Vol. 1, No 1, p. 296.

<sup>61</sup> R. A. S Macfie, “The Gypsies: An Outline Sketch” in *Romanitshels’, Didakais and Folk-Lore Gazette*, 1912, p. 39.

<sup>62</sup> T. Thompson, “Gypsies: An Account of their Character, Mode of Life, Folk-Lore, and Language”, p. 46. See also D. MacRitchie, “The Privileges of the Gypsies ” in *JGLS*, NS, Vol. 1, No 1, p. 343.

<sup>63</sup> Skot, *A Brief Account of Gypsy History*, p. 38.

never give up their wandering ‘...the posh-rats (half-breeds), who have not the restlessness of the true Romanichels, find no difficulty conforming to city life’.<sup>64</sup>

Scholars also held dear to the stereotype of the Gypsies as a static race, maintaining ancient habits and customs. Grellmann had claimed that so attached were they to their habits that: ‘Innovations do not easily succeed with them’.<sup>65</sup> It was assumed, therefore, that as the pure Gypsies constituted an unchanging race, where they maintained purity of blood, they would remain attached to the traditions of their ancestors. Thus in their search for the true romantic Gypsy, scholars looked for a wanderer who adhered to particular customs and systems of belief. It was believed, for example, that an ancient law had existed among the Gypsies, which held that ‘...a marriage union with Gorjos was a hateful and forbidden thing’.<sup>66</sup> In fact, the beliefs the Gypsies attached to marriage were considered by the scholars to be the key to their having maintained purity of blood in the past and that a decline in this observance was one of the chief reasons for the degeneration of the Gypsy race. However, the Rev George Hall suggested that among a minority of true Romanies, this ancient law still operated and accounted for the purity of blood among these tribes. In particular, he claimed that the Gypsies in the northern counties of Wales had remained relatively pure in this respect.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Hawkes, C., “Gypsy Blood” in *Genealogists’ Magazine*, Vol. 6, No. 9. March 1934. pp. 386-395.

<sup>65</sup> Grellmann, *Dissertation on the Gipsies*, p iii.

<sup>66</sup> G. Hall, “The Gipsies of England”[SMGC: C-4-11 (4)], p. 414.

<sup>67</sup> G. Hall, “The Gipsies of England” p. 414.

Other scholars who considered the habits and occupations of the Gypsies went in search of a wanderer who made a living through traditional occupations associated with nomadism, such as the making and hawking of handicrafts or horse-dealing. When Rupert Croft-Cooke wrote that, since the middle of the nineteenth century, the laws, customs and traditional occupations of the Gypsies had been a decline, he related this trend to their racial degeneration. He found that during the nineteenth century handicrafts, entertainment and the practising of 'black arts' had been the chief occupations of the Gypsies. However, he was convinced that over the course of the earlier twentieth century the Gypsies had absorbed so much non-Gypsy blood that 'their blood is intrinsically mixed with ours and many of their racial distinctions have lost their sharpness'.<sup>68</sup> This process he believed had caused the Gypsies to degenerate to such an extent that it was now '...quite impossible to find one leading what would have been recognised sixty years ago as a gypsy life'.<sup>69</sup>

There were many occasions on which members of the Gypsy Lore Society approached the Gypsy encampments only to face disappointment that the behaviour or appearance of the nomads did not meet their expectations. For example in his investigations of the Hungarian Gypsy Coppersmiths who travelled through Britain between 1911 and 1913 Winstedt wrote:

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<sup>68</sup> Croft-Cooke, *A Few Gypsies*, p. 113.

<sup>69</sup> Croft-Cooke, *A Few Gypsies*, p.112. Other scholars considered the decline of 'Gypsy costume' as a parallel to the disappearance of the 'true' Gypsies from the countryside. See for example Yoxall, J., "A word on Gypsy Costume," in *JGLS*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Series, Vol. 1. 1907-1908. pp. 23-25. See also Crofton, "The Former Costume of the Gypsies" in *JGLS*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Series, Vol. 2. 1908- 1909. pp. 207-231.

If my description seems duller than it should be, that is not entirely my fault; for these Gypsies differed from the normal Gypsies in their extraordinary seriousness and their application to work.<sup>70</sup>

In this instance the Gypsies failed to conform to the lorists' ideal of a child-like, carefree people unable to take work seriously. Furthermore Winstedt found that the Coppersmiths lacked 'the darker brown tint and burnished copper appearance of most true blooded-Gypsies'.<sup>71</sup> However, discrepancies between the Gypsies whom they encountered in their investigations and the romantic stereotypes they held so dear did not inevitably lead scholars to the conclusion that the nomads were half-breed or degenerate Gypsies. In the case of the Coppersmiths, the scholars were satisfied with the language and dress of the group and therefore prepared to explain away the discrepancy between the Gypsies and the romantic stereotype. Indeed, Winstedt attributed the colour of the Gypsies' skin to their having been less exposed to the weather than normal wandering Gypsies. Furthermore, Macfie examined the 'un-Gypsylike' behaviour of the coppersmiths from a scientific point of view and attempted to explain it by reference to the primitive nature of the people:

They have conceived an illogical ambition to get wealth; but having got it they had no idea what to do with it- they simply carried it about in sacks, and buried it under their tents...In fact the pursuit of wealth was simply a game, which they played skillfully for the game's sake and not for the prices. They remained, and always will remain,

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<sup>70</sup> Winstedt "The Gypsy Coppersmith's invasion of 1911-13", p. 245.

<sup>71</sup> E. Winstedt "The Gypsy Coppersmith's invasion of 1911-13" in *JGLS*, NS, Vol. 6, No 4, 1912-13, p. 265.

Gypsies, totally indifferent to our civilisation just as the butterflies are indifferent to the planning of gardens.<sup>72</sup>

More often, however, when scholars considered a group of Gypsies to fall short of the romantic stereotype there was a tendency to explain the discrepancy in terms of the racial degeneration of the group.

It has already been shown that during the early twentieth century negative stereotypes of nomads continued to be presented in literature, the press and in the accounts of politicians and missionaries. It would seem that, so deeply were such images entrenched throughout society, that even members of the Gypsy Lore Society were reluctant to reject them outright. Instead, the faith of scholars in the existence of a true romantic Gypsy, coupled with their acceptance of ideas of racial hierarchy and degeneration, led to an overwhelming tendency to ascribe such negative charges to a degenerate section of the nomadic population. Thus, when an article or news report suggested that cleanliness among a particular group of Gypsies left something to be desired, the lorists would confidently declare that the nomads concerned simply ‘...were NOT Gypsies’.<sup>73</sup> The failure of the writer to differentiate between different ranks of the nomadic hierarchy would be blamed for the confusion. Similarly, accusations of criminality which had been hurled at the Gypsies for centuries could be attributed to the infiltration of another blood corrupting the admirable characteristics

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<sup>72</sup> Letter from R. A. S. Macfie to John Casey, 20 May, 1914.

<sup>73</sup> See E Gisholt, “Health Conditions Among Vagrant Children” trans in *The Lancet*, 29 Dec 1934. The article was considered by the reviewer of the Gypsy Lore Society to pay too little attention to differentiating between different groups within the Norwegian nomadic population and to be too quick to assign characteristics of tramps to the purer-bred Gypsies. See also H.G Ward, “Review” in *JGLS*, NS, Vol. 15, 1936. pp. 41-43.

of the true Gypsy. McCormick applied this approach to his study of Scottish Tinkler-Gypsies, whom he believed to be descended from the inter-mixing of Romany and Pictish blood, in the course of which he presented the character of Billy Marshall as a mythical but historical figure with many characteristics in common with Robin Hood. McCormick emphasised that while the honourable traits of Billy Marshall were proof of the Romany element within his blood, ‘...many of Billy’s worst ‘peculiarities’ are not Romani characteristics and must be attributed to his Pictish blood, a strain common alike to the Tinklers of Galloway’.<sup>74</sup> Scholars also drew upon arguments of racial degeneration where claims of idleness were made against the Gypsies. It was claimed that, although it could be found, it was chiefly a trait of the ‘...vagrants of the lowest description and worst character (once termed Beggars, Pikers, Abrahamites and cousin Betties)’.<sup>75</sup>

Thus the moral worth of nomadic groups was believed to be pre-determined by their biological inheritance. Those with the ‘black-blood’ of the pure Romany running through their veins were declared to be an honest and trustworthy people while the half-breeds could be expected to behave most shamefully. The assumption that the behaviour of the Gypsies was biologically determined was a useful mechanism in the work of scholars who were able to express their ideas about the romantic Gypsy without contradicting the negative stereotype outright. In line with this belief,

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<sup>74</sup> McCormick, *The Tinkler-Gypsies*, p. 19.

<sup>75</sup> “The Children’s Bill and the Gypsies” Letter from A. E. Gillington to *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 19 Nov 1908.

whenever Gypsies were accused of behaviour which contradicted the romantic stereotype, the scholars could argue that:

The gipsy is often blamed for offences committed by “mumpers” the wandering beggars of the gorgio or “Gentile” race: but this is an affront to the Romany people who are a finer breed than the nomadic cadgers and vagrants and possessed of far more intelligence.<sup>76</sup>

The temptation to employ this scapegoat mechanism as a means to elevate the Romanies above the crimes of which nomadic people were often accused was too strong for most scholars to resist. The use of such scapegoating has therefore been resilient and can be found in far more recent academic work.<sup>77</sup>

### **Persecution and Political Activism**

Scholars of the early twentieth century Gypsy Lore Society were keenly aware of the way in which Gypsies had been persecuted throughout history and despite the Society’s commitment to the study of Philology, Ethnology and Folk-Lore, many accounts were devoted to cataloguing the persecutions of early Gypsy people in Europe. Incidents noted by scholars included measures such as the hunting of Gypsies, torture and capital punishment. Indeed, Macfie wrote that:

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<sup>76</sup> W. Gallichan, “Is the Gipsy Doomed? A Plea for the Romany Race” in *The Evening News*, 23 Nov 1906.

<sup>77</sup> see for example A. Fraser, “The Travellers. Developments in England and Wales 1953-63” in *JGLS*, Series 3, 1964, Vol. XLIII, Part 3-4, p. 83. Although Fraser does not consider distinctions between Gypsies ‘didikais’ and ‘mumpers’ to be necessary for the purpose of his article he does accept that ‘These distinctions are important in their place, and it is true that the Gypsies are frequently blamed unjustly for bad behaviour on the part of other sections of the travelling community’.

So cruel were the measures adopted in most European countries that it is almost unnecessary to mention such comparatively humane acts as the countless decrees of mere banishment which were pronounced against the race.<sup>78</sup>

The case of the Hungarian Gypsies who, having been falsely accused of cannibalism in 1782, were beheaded, hanged or broken on the wheel, was recorded as an example of persecution despite the fact that the much respected Grellmann had used the accusations as evidence of cannibalism among Gypsies.<sup>79</sup>

A number of factors conspired in 1908, the year following the re-launch of the Gypsy Lore Society, to bring the matter of the persecution of Gypsies to the forefront of the scholars' attention. A conference reported to be taking place in Berne in 1908 was rumoured to be evidence that European statesmen were '...conspiring to wipe off the last traces of the Romany from the western continent'.<sup>80</sup> At first members of the Society hoped these reports were merely sensational nonsense. However, Macfie wrote to the Swiss Government which confirmed the announcements that a conference was to be held.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, the same year witnessed the new Children's Act together with the renewal of agitation for a Moveable Dwellings Act in the British parliament. These developments had the effect of fuelling still further the rumours of

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<sup>78</sup> Skot, *A Brief Account of Gypsy History*, p. 22.

<sup>79</sup> Skot, *A Brief Account of Gypsy History*, p. 23.

<sup>80</sup> "Notice" in *JGLS*, NS, Vol. 1, 28 Jan 1908. See also "Banning the Romany" in *The Tribune*, 3 Jan 1908.

<sup>81</sup> Letter from R. A. S. Macfie to Walter Gallichan, 19 Aug 1908. [SMGC: A26-A30].



conspiracy. In this atmosphere a notice appeared in the 1908 edition of the journal expressing its concern:

The Gypsies are to be attacked, not by individual rulers or municipalities, but by a combination of all the governments of Europe; and unless the Gypsy Lore Society speaks out on behalf of their right to live, they are likely to go without an advocate.<sup>82</sup>

For an instant it seemed that the Gypsy Lore Society was standing on the brink of a new era of protest on behalf of Gypsies, during which they might endeavour to end the harassment and persecution which had been to a great extent ignored by their predecessors. Certainly numerous press reports cited these new threats to the Gypsies as the reason for the revival of the Gypsy Lore Society in 1907.<sup>83</sup>

Macfie wrote to Society member J. H. Yoxall M.P asking him to take up the matter of the European conference at the Home and Foreign Offices.<sup>84</sup> Yoxall vowed to do his best through Parliament 'to keep for the Gypsies, as well as for other people, that opportunity of asylum and that liberty to live, move, and have their being, which have long been one of the elements of common freedom in our land'.<sup>85</sup> Other members of the Society also contributed to the campaign by writing letters to newspapers to voice their opposition to the proposals contained in the Moveable

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<sup>82</sup> "Notice". See also "Banning the Romany" in *The Tribune*, 3 Jan 1908.

<sup>83</sup> "The Gypsy Folk-Lore Society" in *The Morning Advertiser*, 24 Feb 1908. See also "The Gypsy Lore-Society" in *Manchester Guardian*, 24 Feb 1908.

<sup>84</sup> Letter from R. A. S. Macfie to J.H. Yoxall MP, 13 Nov 1908. [SMGC: A26-A30].

<sup>85</sup> "Notice"

Dwellings Bill and the Children's Bill.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, it was also decided that part of the April number of the journal would be devoted to 'the defence of Gypsydom' from various points of view and perhaps to historical examples of abortive attempts to 'civilise' the race.<sup>87</sup> A flurry of activity followed in the next few months and in April the journal carried a series of articles addressing the social problems faced by Gypsies.

Through such activity members of the Gypsy Lore Society hoped to help the people whom they studied by campaigning on their behalf. However, an analysis of such work not only reveals the stereotypes of the Gypsy in all their force but also illustrates the dependence of scholars on the use of racial classifications of travellers in their arguments. In both their academic work and campaigns on behalf of the Gypsies, members pointed out that they hoped to safeguard the freedom of the 'pure' Romany, but equally did not believe all members of the nomadic population deserved the same rights. Indeed, members of the Gypsy Lore Society often employed arguments which were detrimental to the social position of these other nomads.

The assumption that the pure Romanies were a distinct race, more admirable than the rest of the travelling population, can frequently be found in the arguments of scholars against repressive legislation. While Macfie accepted the value of regulations for other nomadic peoples, he argued that the Romany was '...a group apart - a different race, with exceptional natures and instincts' and that they '...therefore need

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<sup>86</sup> "The Children's Bill and the Gypsies" Letter from A. E. Gillington to *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 19 Nov 1908.

<sup>87</sup> "Notice"

exceptional treatment'.<sup>88</sup> This argument was often repeated. In accordance with this approach David MacRitchie was particularly critical of the work of George Smith of Coalville who had led the agitation for the Moveable Dwellings Bill in the 1880s.<sup>89</sup> He attacked the one-sidedness of Smith's strategy in that it failed to appreciate the racial difference between the Gypsy and sedentary population. For, like Macfie, MacRitchie had a sentimental attachment to the image of the Gypsy as a race apart.

The claim was made that while repressive measures could be useful for those lower down on the nomadic hierarchy, in the case of the true Gypsies they would only spoil their romantic way of life. In writing against both the Moveable Dwellings Bill and New Forest Good Samaritan Charity, Arthur Symons focused his opposition not on the problems such measures could cause for those living a nomadic way of life, but on the potential which they carried for 'spoiling the Gypsies' who 'live by rote and by faith and by tradition which is part of their blood'.<sup>90</sup> His concern was grounded in the need for society to keep alive '...the last romance left on Earth,' which was for him personified by the Gypsy.<sup>91</sup> David MacRitchie adopted a similar approach. He had a first hand knowledge of the persecution of the German Gypsies who arrived in Britain

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<sup>88</sup> Letter from R. A .S. Macfie to Lord Farrer, 20 Aug 1908. [SMGC: A26-A30].

<sup>89</sup> MacRitchie, "The Privileges of the Gypsies". An examination of the treatment of German Gypsies in Britain during the early twentieth century can be found in C. Holmes, "The German Gypsy Question in Britain 1904-06" in K. Lunn (ed.) *Hosts Immigrants and Minorities: Historical Responses to Newcomers in British Society*, Dawson: Folkstone, 1980. pp. 134-159.

<sup>90</sup> Symons, "In Praise of Gypsies" p. 295.

<sup>91</sup> Symons, "In Praise of Gypsies" p. 296.

between 1904 and 1906 and found themselves hunted from pillar to post.<sup>92</sup> However, he too was critical of philanthropic attempts to aid travellers, not out of any concern for them as individuals suffering persecution, but because he was convinced that forced marches in the wind and rain were regarded lightly by the pure Gypsies whose hereditary spirit gave them a fatalistic outlook.<sup>93</sup>

In writing of the threat posed to the Scottish Tinkers by the proposals of the 1918 Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland, Andrew McCormick attempted to employ a similar argument by elevating the Tinkers to a high place within the nomadic hierarchy.<sup>94</sup> He was gravely concerned by those social reformers who pursued a system of oppression against the Tinkers. In attacking this repressive legislation, he placed a hierarchical framework on the travelling population, scapegoating other nomads for the crimes of which the pure Tinkers and Gypsies were so often accused. He was adamant that:

Gypsiologists all know that the pure-blooded Gypsies are much finer types than the mix bloods or *didakais*. The pure-bred Tinkers too are much finer types than those intermarried with house-dwellers.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> MacRitchie, "The Privileges of the Gypsies". An examination of the treatment of German Gypsies in Britain during the early twentieth century can be found in C. Holmes, "The German Gypsy Question in Britain 1904-06" in K. Lunn (ed.) *Hosts Immigrants and Minorities: Historical Responses to Newcomers in British Society*, Dawson: Folkstone, 1980. pp. 134-159. See also J. Sampson, "The "German Gypsies" at Blackpool" in *JGLS*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Series, Vol. pp. 227-228.

<sup>93</sup> Symons, "In Praise of Gypsies" p. 296.

<sup>94</sup> A. McCormick, "Review of *A Green Glass-Widow and Other Stories* by Jane. H. Findlater" in *JGLS*, 3 Series, Vol. I, 1922. pp. 138 - 143.

<sup>95</sup> A. McCormick, "Review", pp. 207-231.

McCormick feared that the proposals of the 1918 Departmental Committee would result in an increased association between the Tinkers and members of the slum-dwelling sedentary population in the towns, which would lead, he claimed, to the raising of an inferior breed with marked criminal tendencies.<sup>96</sup> What is interesting is that when his fears for racial purity had been set aside, McCormick advocated policies almost identical to those of the social reformers themselves. He called for the Tinker to be provided with improved food and clothing and better accommodation whether it be van, tent, or house in the country. He was also clear that he accepted the need for a systematic and compulsory inspection of these living quarters by Ministry of Health Sanitary Inspectors and District nurses.

The behaviour of scholars in their political campaigning was often illustrative of their determination to maintain their own authority in the field of Gypsy studies. In attempting to show their superior knowledge in Gypsy matters, academics often employed arguments which focused on the importance yet complexity of the racial categorisation of travellers. Hence Gallichan argued that the 'Gypsy question' should be left entirely to those who understood the 'psychology of the Romany brain'.<sup>97</sup> Similarly, other scholars strove to prove that the Gypsies mentioned in various reports were not 'true Gypsies' and speculated as to whether the reformers and politicians were qualified to draw the distinction.<sup>98</sup> This questioning of the authority of philanthropists and politicians is evident in an article written by MacRitchie criticising

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<sup>96</sup> Written statement of A. McCormick to *Departmental Committee on Tinkers in Scotland*, (1918), SRO: HH61/77.

<sup>97</sup> W. Gallichan, "The State *versus* the Gypsy" in *JGLS*, NS, Vol. 1, 1907. p. 351.

<sup>98</sup> MacRitchie, "The Privileges of the Gypsies", p. 343.

the work of George Smith of Coalville. The author explained the miseries which Smith found among the Gypsies by referring to the reformer's own ignorance. For '...he knew not a Gypsy from a 'Mumpley' Gorgio tramp; and most of his time was spent among queer fish who had been Gypsies 'nearly' all their lives..'.<sup>99</sup> In this way it seemed that often what the Tories found so offensive in the state policies relating to Gypsies was not their repressive nature, nor their implications for the lifestyle of the group, but rather their infringement upon an area of expertise which they felt uniquely qualified to tackle.

Campaigning on behalf of the Gypsy never became the chief concern of the Gypsy Lore Society. Indeed, the campaigns waged by the Gypsy Lore Society against the Moveable Dwellings Bill and the Children's Bill, did not even begin until the Bills had already passed the Commons. In the case of the Children's Bill, Macfie was urged by Earl Russell that the campaign would be more likely to succeed if he were to go to the Home Office and plead the case of the Gypsies to Herbert Samuel.<sup>100</sup> However, Macfie felt that his work load in Liverpool would make such a mission impossible and instead asked Yates to write on behalf of the Society. A similarly half-hearted approach can be detected in the campaign against the Moveable Dwellings Bill. Macfie had written to the Chaplain of the Van Dweller's Protection Association in a failed attempt to engage their support in the campaign. However, when Lord Sainsbury's Select Committee of 1909-1910 enquired into the need for a Moveable Dwellings Bill, the Gypsy Lore Society did not present evidence. The Van-Dweller's

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<sup>99</sup> MacRitchie, "The Privileges of the Gypsies ", p. 343.

<sup>100</sup> Letter from R.A.S. Macfie to D. Yates, 14 Nov 1908. [SMGC: A26-A30].

Protection Association, which did, was able to persuade the Committee to distinguish between the hard working and honest showfolk and the Gypsy, for whom regulation was required. Though the Bill was never translated into legislation, the success of the Association in securing the insertion of an exemption clause into the Bill had the effect of encouraging the Showmen to keep its doors firmly shut to Gypsies.<sup>101</sup>

The initial interest which the scholars expressed in the social problems faced by the Gypsies, after their attention had been drawn to the matter by the Society's journal in 1908, did not mark the beginning of an era of social campaigning on behalf of the Gypsies by the Gypsy Lore Society.<sup>102</sup> The concern, in 1908, over the Children's Bill, the Moveable Dwellings Bill and the conference rumoured to be taking place at Berne was soon alleviated. The Moveable Dwellings Bill was dropped from the political agenda in face of more pressing issues and the Children's Act was modified. Fears over the conference in Berne were also allayed when both the Foreign Office and the Home Office announced that there was no foundation in the rumour that a British delegate would be attending.<sup>103</sup> With such developments, the Gypsy Lore Society seemed to forget its new calling to investigate the social position of the Gypsy and the day-to-day problems they faced seemed to be forgotten amidst the exciting discovery of new Gypsy dialects.

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<sup>101</sup> The determination of the show people not to be confused with Gypsies can be seen in G. Sanger, *Seventy Years a Showman*, London: C Arthur Pearson, 1907. p. 46.

<sup>102</sup> "Notice" in *JGLS*, NS, Vol. 1, 28 Jan 1908.

<sup>103</sup> "English Gipsy Life: Mr Yoxall, M.P on Pending Legislation", in *The Daily News*, 26 Feb 1908.

The years after the campaigns of 1908-9 were not entirely devoid of attempts to help the Gypsies. As individuals, many members of the Gypsy Lore Society continued to write to newspapers to voice their objections to anti-Gypsy reporting. Augustus John did so throughout his life.<sup>104</sup> Yet, on the whole, it would seem that it was only when an event proved sensational enough to attract media attention that members of the Society became involved in such campaigns. Such an incident occurred in 1937 when the Gypsies were banned from their traditional camping ground on the Epsom Downs by the conservators appointed under the Epsom and Walton Downs Regulation Act of 1936. The ban was widely reported and Dora Yates was quick to respond to the call of local land owner Lady Sybil Grant in her campaign on behalf of the Gypsies.<sup>105</sup> The Society succeeded in collecting 158 signatures in a petition against the ban and also embarked on a letter writing campaign to newspapers.<sup>106</sup> However, the campaign against the banning of the Gypsies from Epsom Downs was also of little long-term significance. Indeed, it was focused on the lifting of the ban during Derby week only and so avoided tackling the wider issue of the banning of Gypsies from many of their traditional camping grounds, a process which was occurring on a much larger scale.

The image of the disorganised and child-like wanderer led many members to believe that Gypsies themselves could not be involved in political activity. In fact, the idea that the Gypsies may have been capable of uniting in political protest against their

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<sup>104</sup> M. Holroyd, *Augustus John, Vol. II: The Years of Experiences*, London: Book Club Associates, 1975, p. 175.

<sup>105</sup> "Gypsies on the Epsom Downs" Letter from D.E Yates to *The Observer*, 2 May 1937.

<sup>106</sup> "Epsom Downs By-Laws to be Enforced" in *The Times*, 27 May 1937.



persecution seemed as ridiculous to the lorists of the early twentieth century as it might have done to Grellmann writing in the eighteenth century, a time when Gypsy slavery was still widespread across eastern Europe. When commenting on travellers who did engage in protest, scholars would emphasise with scorn just how far removed such people were from the true Romanies.<sup>107</sup> Winstedt revealed this trait in his references to the nomads who had engaged in the Van Dweller's Protection Association. He described the Showmen as 'mumpley-show-folk' and argued that the primitive nature of the Gypsy made his participation in such action unthinkable. The fact that the showfolk had organised in such a way was taken by Winstedt as evidence that they were a quite different class of traveller from the 'true' Gypsy who enjoyed a carefree and independent life.<sup>108</sup> When making reference to the Romani Nationalist Movement in her memoirs, Dora Yates expressed a similar attitude to that of Winstedt, exclaiming that 'except in a fairy tale could any hope ever have been more fantastic?'<sup>109</sup>

Scholars were not absolutely uniform in their belief that Gypsies were incapable of political action, however. Society member Alice E. Gillington, who was actively involved in the campaigns against the Moveable Dwellings Bill and the Children's Bill, suggested involving the Gypsies in the campaign by way of

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<sup>107</sup> E. O. Winstedt, "Gypsy Civilisations" in *JGLS*, NS, April 1908.

<sup>108</sup> Symons, "In Praise of Gypsies", p. 297.

<sup>109</sup> Yates, *My Gypsy Days*, p. 140. Also cited in I. Hancock, *The Pariah Syndrome*, Michigan: Karoma Publishers, 1987, p. 127.

encouraging them to sign a petition to the King.<sup>110</sup> However, this idea tended to be dismissed as too difficult because of the travelling way of life of the Gypsies.<sup>111</sup> So deep-rooted was the image of the Gypsies as a primitive people, incapable of political organisation, though, that it persisted well in to the twentieth century. Hence the claim that, 'The Gypsies have no leaders, no executive committees, no nationalist movement...I know of no authenticated case of a genuine Gypsy allegiance to political or religious cause.'<sup>112</sup>

### **The Influence of the Gypsy Scholars**

The articles detailing the investigations carried out by members of the Gypsy Lore Society which can be found in the Society's journal cannot have had have had anything other than a negligible influence on the way in which Gypsies were perceived and treated by the wider British population.<sup>113</sup> The journal's circulation was extremely small and many articles, which included vocabulary lists and Gypsy pedigrees, would have held little interest to those outside the Society. However, the publications of members of the Society were not limited to the pages of the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*. Indeed, many Gypsy scholars published their findings in books or journals with a far wider circulation.<sup>114</sup> In addition, scholars of the Gypsy Lore Society such as

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<sup>110</sup> Letter from A. E. Gillington to R.A.S. Macfie, 23 Nov 1908. [SMGC: A26-A30].

<sup>111</sup> Letter from R.A.S. Macfie to A.E Gillington, 30 Nov 1908. [SMGC: A26-A30].

<sup>112</sup> W. Cohn, *The Gypsies*, Reading: Addison Wesley, 1973, pp. 66. Also cited in Hancock, *The Pariah Syndrome*, p. 127.

<sup>113</sup> Yates, *My Gypsy Days*, p. 161.

<sup>114</sup> See G. F. Black, *A Gypsy Bibliography*, Edinburgh: University Press, 1914. See also Binns, *A Gypsy Bibliography*, Manchester: Dennis Binns Publications, 1982.

Sampson and Macfie, gave numerous lectures which covered various aspects of their interest in Gypsy language, folk-lore and ethnology to other groups and societies.<sup>115</sup>

All told, the Society was extremely prolific and the work of members was not limited to the scientific study of the Gypsies but spanned many genres. Scholars associated with it indulged in writing fictional accounts of Gypsy life and even mingled these accounts in their more scientific studies.<sup>116</sup> John Sampson, for example, went to great lengths to collect samples of romantic prose and poetry about Gypsy life in an anthology, *Wind on the Heath*: a number of students whom he influenced during his time as a Liverpool Librarian felt similarly inclined to write Gypsy fiction.<sup>117</sup> As a consequence, during the early twentieth century the Society's members published a mass of fictional material of varying quality featuring Gypsy heroes and heroines. Without exception these portrayals were romantic rather than fearsome accounts.<sup>118</sup>

Throughout the early twentieth century, Society members also put a considerable amount of time and effort into airing their opinions in the popular press.

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<sup>115</sup> R.A.S. Macfie "History, Wandering, Character, and Customs of British Gypsies", A lecture to the Tyneside Geographical Society, 15 February 1910. Macfie, see *Newcastle Daily Journal*, 16 Feb 1910. R.A.S. Macfie "The Gypsies Their History, Character and Customs" Lecture to Southport Literary and Philosophical Society, 17 Feb 1910 see *The Southport Guardian*, 19 Feb 1910. J. Sampson, "On the Origin and Early Migrations of the Gypsies" a paper read before the Anthropological Section of the British Society, 17 Sept 1923. [SMGC: E-1-102 (5)]. Hall, Rev G read a paper "Gipsies in Fact and Fiction" to the Louth Antiquarian Society, Oct., 1907 see *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 30 Oct 1907.

<sup>116</sup> Croft-Cooke, *A Few Gypsies*,

<sup>117</sup> J. Sampson, *Wind on the Heath*, For examples of the work of students influenced by Sampson See G. Imlach, *Freda's Fortune. A Book for Girls*, London: T. C and E. C Jack, 1907. See also M. Lyster, *The Gypsy Life of Betsy Wood*, London, 1926.

<sup>118</sup> See for example novels describing Gypsy life and habits by J. H. Yoxall, *The Romany Stone* and *Smalilou*.

A significant number of popular magazines included interviews with members of the Gypsy Lore Society and biographical accounts of their lives and work.<sup>119</sup> Other scholars were able to air their opinions in popular newspapers.<sup>120</sup> The interest of editors was rarely confined to the Society's academics; newspapers also featured accounts of the activities of other members. When Society member Lady Arthur Grosvenor obtained a peddler's licence and a Gypsy caravan and set off on an extensive tour of the country, for example, reporters followed in amusement and both local and national papers made frequent reports of her progress.<sup>121</sup>

During their attempts at political campaigning on behalf of Gypsies, members of the Gypsy Lore Society would frequently engage in letter writing campaigns to national newspapers. Such letters almost inevitably drew upon the ideas of the racial degeneration of the Gypsies and the fact that these degenerates were indeed a problem group:

To banish the tramp and the beggar, equally obnoxious and both a public menace to our streets and roads; to compel their wretched offspring to become inmates of industrial schools- this is quite as it should be. But cannot the law yet distinguish

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<sup>119</sup> Numerous interviews of members of the Gypsy Lore Society and accounts of their work were used in newspapers and magazines. See for example, "Provost McCormick" in *Border Magazine: An Illustrated Monthly Devoted to Border Biography, History, Literature and Folk-Lore*, Vol. XIII, No. 151, July 1908.

<sup>120</sup> See for example R. A. S. Macfie "The Gipsy Coppersmiths" in *The Manchester Guardian*, 30 Aug 1912.

<sup>121</sup> See "Lady Grosvenor-Gipsy", in *The Sunday Chronicle*, 16 June 1907. "A Society Gipsy" in *The Morning Leader*, 14 July 1907. "Titled Gipsy: Lady Arthur Grosvenor's Disguise" in *The Brighton Standard*, 17 June 1907.

the difference between the slouching tramp and the clean,  
set-up stalwart, somewhat horsey form of the gypsy?<sup>122</sup>

At times, the scholars managed to command a significant amount of space in popular newspapers and though the issue of Gypsies was rarely of more than marginal interest to the press, members of the Society would often be quoted in reports and sometimes cited as authorities on the subject. The ideas of the Society which appeared in the press contained all the aspects of the stereotypes which have been discussed in relation to more scholarly work. When a group of Gypsies was considered to be a problem to the general public and was reported as being a nuisance, articles would often include a statement from a member of the Society asserting that the perpetrators of such deeds were nothing but a half-breed group which had degenerated and long ago lost any claim to a connection with the 'true Romany'. The theories of members of the Society were not new but the culmination of ideas, which had been evident in the accounts of European commentators on the Gypsies for centuries. It would be an exaggeration to suggest that the Gypsy Lore Society was an influential group of individuals. Even Dora Yates admitted it was perceived by the outside world as '...a body of idealists or a fraternity of vagabonds'.<sup>123</sup> However, it was regarded as an authority source on Gypsy life. As a result, during the early twentieth century a number of figures, including missionaries, justices of the peace and the police who hoped to obtain

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<sup>122</sup> Letter from A. E. Gillington, "Gipsies And Children Bill" to the editor of *The Standard*, 24 Nov 1908. See also Letter from A. E Gillington "Gipsy Children" to the editor of *The Globe*, 26 Nov 1908.

<sup>123</sup> Yates *My Gypsy Days*, p. 161.

information about the British Gypsies, made their inquiries to the Gypsy Lore Society.<sup>124</sup>

### Summary

Throughout the early twentieth century the pre-existing stereotypes of the Gypsy underwent no fundamental change. The members of the Gypsy Lore Society remained attached to the romantic picture of Gypsy life and throughout their work were determined to paint the Gypsy in a colourful light. Thus the investigations of scholars added yet more layers to existing images of the romantic Gypsy. Their work offered weak explanations for many of the unsound claims of their predecessors. Indeed, the work of the Gypsy scholars was often based on the highly unsound foundations of the work of figures such as Grellmann and Borrow.<sup>125</sup> It became incredibly difficult for contemporaries to contradict the work of the scholars, however, due to their use of the highly prestigious vocabulary of science and more specifically of racial degeneration. The mythical figure presented in the work of the scholars was said to be one of 'pure blood'; a Gypsy with only a remote resemblance to the romantic stereotype was presented as someone whose blood had been diluted.

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<sup>124</sup> See for example in Letter from R. A. S. Macfie to the British and Foreign Bible Society, 11 Nov 1908. [SMGC: A26-A30]. See also letter from R. A. S Macfie to unnamed recipient on the subject of evangelical work among the Gypsies of Great Britain, 31 Oct 1911. [SMGC: A26-A30]. See also Lieutenant Crosland, Letter to D. E. Yates, 23 Sept 1932. GLS Correspondence Files: I-III, A-G.

<sup>125</sup> The inaccuracies and plagiarism in the work of scholars such as Borrow and Grellmann is examined in W. Willems, *In Search of the True Gypsy from Enlightenment to Final Solution*, London: Frank Cass, 1997.

Although the scholars were by no means engaging in sophisticated racial theorising in their work among the Gypsies, their approach was undoubtedly heavily informed by developments in other academic disciplines. In particular, the prestige increasingly attached to the use of scientific methods of study in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was influential.<sup>126</sup> During this period there was a strong preference for investigative techniques, which, it was believed, would enable scientists to isolate the defining characteristics of the people they studied and draw them into categories. Following in this tradition, members of the Gypsy Lore Society drew up lists of criteria by which, they believed, could enable them to measure the purity of the Gypsy people.

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<sup>126</sup> M. Biddiss, "Myths of the Blood: European Racist Ideology 1850-1945" in *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 9, No. 5, September-October 1975, p. 14.

## **Conclusion**

Relations between the Gypsies and the house-dwelling population in early twentieth century Britain were underpinned by the suspicion and antipathy towards nomadism, which had existed throughout Europe for centuries. This intolerance assumed a number of forms. The group was frequently harassed by authorities at the local level and missionaries also approached the camps convinced that there was a need to bring about the transformation of the group. The responses of different sectors of sedentary society to the Gypsies were justified with references to the plethora of negative images, which remained prominent in the early twentieth century. The romantic Gypsy stereotype was also important but, outside works of fiction and the scholarly offerings of members of the Gypsy Lore Society, it rarely occupied more than a marginal place in accounts of nomadic life.

In considering the responses to the Gypsies followed by successive Central Governments a number of patterns become evident. A key theme has been the strong degree of consistency followed by Governments of different political persuasions in their approach to nomadic groups. One example of this can be seen in the case of the 1905 Aliens Act. During the debates leading up to the passage of this legislation under a Conservative Government many Liberal MPs had defended the right of refugees to seek a safe haven in Britain. However, in 1906 the Liberal Government which had inherited the legislation made an order under the Act intended to deter shipping companies from bringing immigrant Gypsies to Britain.

Another important theme is that despite the great deal of concern over the extent of nomadism in Britain, successive Central Governments preferred not to



pursue an openly repressive policy towards Gypsies. Indeed, the Home Office blocked a number of assimilationist proposals for dealing with nomadism during the early twentieth century. It also remained unwilling to ratify private bills which gave particular local authorities increased powers for dealing with the Gypsies. However, such action was not illustrative of a new degree of tolerance. Despite its anti-assimilationist stance, Central Governments continued to arm the local authorities with powers to control the every day life of the Gypsies.

The self-consciousness, which characterised the approach of legislators, resulted from official concerns regarding measures which might infringe on civil liberties rather than any concern for the welfare of nomadic groups. The state was anxious, for example, to avoid ratifying legislation that could interfere with the rights of those who enjoyed camping and caravanning as leisure pursuits. Furthermore, it believed:

Public opinion would not tolerate a severe method of repression...were it not satisfied that this repression would only be exercised where the act of mendicancy or vagrancy was criminal or quasi-criminal in its effect or in its tendency.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, even if the central authorities had favoured the introduction of repressive legislation to curb nomadism, the perceived freedom to take such action was limited.

The approach of legislators was further complicated by the State's reluctance against coming down too severely on the so-called romantic old-fashioned Gypsies. As a result, legislators chose to avoid a repressive stance towards all nomads and

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<sup>1</sup> HO Memo, 8 Jan 1904. PRO: HO45/10499/117669.

refused to ratify the severe legislative measures called for by the Salvation Army and the Surrey Anti-Vagrancy Association. However, some interest in placating the calls of those who wished to secure legislation, which would increase the regulatory powers of local authorities over the nomads, still remained. Thus successive governments adopted a piecemeal approach and during the 1930s, numerous seemingly inconspicuous clauses were incorporated into health, housing and town planning legislation, which increased the powers of local authorities over the nomads. Many such clauses bore a striking resemblance to those contained in the moveable dwellings bills which had been blocked in Parliament.

At the local level, the public and local landowners continued to complain about the presence of Gypsies and the nomads remained susceptible to harassment by the police, council, school and sanitary inspectors. Although concerns were expressed about damage to property, theft or the spread of disease, when Gypsies were in the area, objections would also be made about their alleged moral failings. Complainants often focused on the failure of the nomads to attend church, to educate their children, to engage in permanent wage labour, and the way in which they slept in close proximity to one another. The action taken by local authorities was often motivated by the need to placate irate local residents by driving the Gypsies out of the area as quickly as possible. In some instances the police were prepared to go beyond the law to achieve this aim while elsewhere, local councils campaigned for private legislation or changes in the law to increase their powers over the nomads.

The response of missionaries to the Gypsies during the early twentieth century was varied. Some missionary societies continued to perceive the Gypsies as a

degraded group of savages characterised by heathenism, idleness and filth. The depth of such feeling is illustrated by the persistent attempts on the part of the Scottish churches and the Salvation Army to bring about the assimilation of nomadic groups. By engaging in such endeavours, the treatment of the Gypsies by missionaries could often bear a striking resemblance to the way in which colonial missionaries approached the populations they encountered outside Europe.<sup>2</sup> In these attempts at conversion the emphasis remained on encouraging the Gypsies to take on the values of settlement, industry, thrift and cleanliness. Within other organisations such as the London City Mission, the tendency towards wholesale condemnation of the Gypsies appears to have been in decline.<sup>3</sup> However, even those missionaries who no longer required the Gypsies to give up their nomadic habits continued to attach a great deal of importance to their conforming to the ways of settled society in other respects. The interest in ensuring that the nomads married in church, as emphasised in the work of the Church Army among the Hampshire Gypsies, is one example of this.<sup>4</sup>

The continuing pressure to secure funding was a significant factor in determining the approach which missionaries took to the Gypsies. This burden influenced their accounts of the group in mission magazines, news features and their reports to those bodies which provided them with financial support. In particular, there was a tendency to exploit stereotypes of the Gypsies in order to win much needed moral and financial backing. In so doing, missionaries drew on both romantic

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<sup>2</sup> See for example D. Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians: English attitudes to the Negro in the mid-nineteenth century*, Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1978. pp. 77-80.

<sup>3</sup> "The Gypsy Problem" in *The London City Mission Magazine*, Vol. 85, No. 1001, August 1920, pp. 89-90.

<sup>4</sup> *Gipsy Missioning in the New Forest*, Oxford: Church Army Press. 1934. Probably written by Captain R. Thomas.

and antipathetic images of the group. Romantic images of Gypsy life, which painted a picture of an inquisitive and child-like people in need of guidance in religion, enabled them to appeal for sympathy for their charges.<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere, they emphasised negative stereotypes and stressed the state of sin and depravity in which they claimed to have found the Gypsies, in order to illustrate the importance of their work.<sup>6</sup> Such was the flexibility of the two Gypsy stereotypes that, at times, missionaries drew upon both at once, emphasising the romantic qualities of the Gypsies and their simultaneous receptivity to missionary activity alongside accounts of their ignorance of the scripture, the Christian marriage and baptism.<sup>7</sup>

The response of scholars who formed the Gypsy Lore Society, differed from that of other sectors of sedentary society. Although romantic ideas about the Gypsies had a wider prominence outside the Society, and can similarly be found in artwork, novels, poetry, and press reports, the longing to befriend the Gypsies and to record and preserve their language and customs was not an interest that was widely shared.<sup>8</sup> The idea of the Gypsies as a distinct race was fundamental to the approach of members of the Gypsy Lore Society. It was claimed that:

They are distinguished from the people of every land which they inhabit; there is something in them finer, stranger, more primitive, something baffling to all who do not understand them through a natural sympathy.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>See for example "Glad Tidings from Gipsydom" in *The London City Mission Magazine*, No 897, Vol. LXXVI, Sept 1911. p. 173.

<sup>6</sup> See for example "The Gospel In Gipsydom" in *The London City Mission Society Messenger*, Nov 1909, Vol. I, No 9, p. 130.

<sup>7</sup> "Among The Forest Gypsies. Life in the Compounds Described. How The Church Army Helps Them" in *Hampshire Advertiser and Independent*, 28 April 1934.

<sup>8</sup> See above, chapter two.

<sup>9</sup> A. Symons, "In Praise of Gypsies" in *JGLS*, NS, April 1908. Vol. 1. p.297.

Despite the fact they considered the 'true' Gypsies to be a rare and rapidly vanishing people, individual members of the Society were invariably convinced that the Gypsies of their acquaintance were of the purest breed. The fact they believed members of the Society alone were in contact with the few remaining true Gypsies gave these scholars a perverse sense of their own importance and led them to be contemptuous towards missionary or welfare work. Members remained convinced that the true Gypsies were disappearing and concerned that they should be safeguarded from persecution and, often, the attentions of missionaries. However, even among members the view prevailed that those nomads who could not, by reference to their own highly subjective criteria, be regarded as the true Gypsies deserved no reprieve from repressive legislation.

The responses of the Government, missionaries and local authorities to the Gypsies could be contradictory both in themselves and in relation to each other. One theme, which has surfaced persistently during the course of this investigation, has been the conflict between short and long term solutions to the Gypsy question. This friction was evident in the State's response to the group. There was an inherent incompatibility between the perceived need to exercise paternalistic guidance over the nomads and encourage them to settle over the long term, and the need to placate those who called for powers to move the Gypsies on in the short term. This conflict of interest resulted from a contradiction between the long term view of central Government and the more short term concerns of local authorities in many areas. For, although the former appears to have favoured policies which might encourage the

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gradual and voluntary settlement of the Gypsies, there was a preference within the latter for keeping them out of their area completely. The implication of this friction was evident in the Children's Act. The legislators hoped such legislation might, over a period of time, alter the wandering habits of the Gypsies. In the event, the working of the Act was hampered by the refusal of local schools to admit Gypsy children and the actions of police in moving their families on.

A similar conflict of interests can be detected within the work of some missionaries. While there was an interest in bringing about the settlement of the group and encouraging their assimilation, there was a fear that incorporating them into the wider church-going population could lead to conflict. The solution, therefore, was regarded as resting in the provision of separate services and religious meeting for the Gypsies, while simultaneously encouraging them to adopt the values and habits of members of the sedentary population.

Although the actions taken by Central Government, missionaries, and local authorities could be contradictory, their objectives were markedly similar. All these agencies, in one way or another, considered that the presence of the Gypsies and their adherence to their traditional way of life was inappropriate or unacceptable in early twentieth century Britain. It was believed that the Gypsies had been or perhaps in some few cases still were, romantic and desirable. Yet these agencies were all motivated chiefly by negative perceptions of the Gypsies and the conviction that some sort of reform was needed. Although the Gypsy Lore Society opposed this approach, it did so only insofar as it might lead to the harassment of the so-called true Gypsies. In the case of those nomads considered half-breeds or tramps the attitudes of members

of the Society does not appear to have been markedly different from those which prevailed elsewhere.

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Despite different sectors of sedentary society having similar objectives in their treatment of Gypsies, responses to the group were justified in a multitude of different ways. Sometimes commentators focused solely on racial or cultural reasons.<sup>10</sup> Elsewhere moral, religious, economic, educational, legal or medical considerations were drawn upon to support a particular response. Whatever the emphasis, commentators drew upon established stereotypes to justify their stance and all these images revealed more about the working of sedentary society than about the Gypsies themselves.

Through references to existing images of the nomads, the Gypsies could be assigned one of three identities. The first viewed them as part of a troublesome class of vagrants, the second as a romantic race, the third as a degenerate group of wanderers. The eagerness to draw the Gypsies into a distinct category is reflective of wider trends in social and scientific study. It was hoped that once a people had been categorised in this way, their behaviour could be drawn into predictable patterns making them more transparent and therefore controllable. Invariably responses to Gypsies were justified by reference to one of these identities. The two identities of the Gypsy which have been most prominent in this study have been that of a romantic race of wanderers and that of a degenerate group. These images were not contradictory but formed part of a complementary understanding of Gypsy identity.

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<sup>10</sup> The work of the Gypsy Lore Society in particular is illustrative of the tendency to justify responses to Gypsies with reference to their 'racial' difference from the sedentary population.



Hence, the belief was frequently expressed that the Gypsies had once been a romantic race but had degenerated.

An acceptance of distinct identities can be found in the arguments of both those who opposed Gypsies and those who idealised them. The expression of sympathy for the romantic wanderers of the past enabled those who sought the abolition of the nomadic way of life to retain a facade of compassion without compromising their true agenda. Equally, those who hoped to raise the Gypsies above the crimes they had allegedly committed could draw upon the different identities of the group. The so-called true Gypsies could be exonerated from negative stereotypes, which could instead be attributed to the half-breeds or tramps. The reconciliation of the romantic and degenerate images of the Gypsies was often dependent on an understanding of some form of biological rather than social or economic degeneration. This understanding is evident in the way in which many commentators differentiated between so-called true Gypsies and half-breeds and included references to the inter-mixing between the Gypsies and undesirable elements of sedentary society. Whether they were employed by the supporters or opponents of the group, ideas on the degeneration of the Gypsies were self-serving. Whereas members of the Gypsy Lore Society emphasised this interest only in the 'pure' old-fashioned Gypsies, local authorities claimed only to oppose the degenerate half-breeds or pseudo Gypsies.

The idea of a racial hierarchy of nomads had further uses than merely that of a means to reconcile the two stereotypes. On a number of occasions during the early twentieth century, the idea of a nomadic hierarchy was also applied to the Gypsies of

Europe, and the argument put forward that the Gypsies of some countries were somehow more or less desirable than those of others. Although the British remained unwilling to join other European powers in their efforts to act in united fashion against the Gypsies of Europe, politicians of all parties opposed the arrival of foreign Gypsies in Britain. Likewise, the public, press and local authorities expressed horror at the idea of such nomads entering the country and demanded action. The German Gypsies who arrived in 1904-06 attracted particular hostility:

They ought never to have been allowed to land; but having landed, when their crime and vice were declared, they ought to have been collected at once, and either exported whence they came or placed in a barbed wire compound.<sup>11</sup>

This antipathy towards foreign Gypsies in Britain must also be considered within the broader context of ideas about the superiority and inferiority of different European nations.<sup>12</sup> In an atmosphere in which certain European countries were regarded as inferior to Britain it would appear that, however negative the common perception of the British Gypsies, the nomads coming from other European countries were considered even less desirable. And, when impoverished groups of Gypsies, believed to be Macedonian or German, began to arrive in Britain between 1904 and 1906 they became victims not only because they were Gypsies but also partly because those who considered them to be of Macedonian origin regarded them inhabiting a less advanced part of the Continent. The hostility also reflected a growing anti-German sentiment in Britain, in the case of those who viewed the newcomers as German. However, there were exceptions to this treatment of foreign Gypsies. The Hungarian

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<sup>11</sup> Sir P. Muntz, Unionist MP for Tamworth, cited in "German Gypsies to Stay. Costly Aliens Refuse to be Deported" in *Daily Mail*, 15 Nov 1906.

Coppersmiths, who arrived in Britain a few years later, were able to some extent to escape the hostility faced by the earlier arrivals. This more lenient treatment was due in part to their wealth and also because they displayed qualities associated with romantic stereotypes of wanderers.

It would appear, then, that racial perceptions and explanations of the identity of the Gypsies formed an integral part of the common understanding of the group in early twentieth century Britain. Images of race and racial degeneration were used to provide a logical explanation for the existence of two contradictory stereotypes at every level of society from government reports to children's fiction.<sup>13</sup> However, ideas of race and racial hierarchy alone do not fully account for antipathy to Gypsies in early twentieth century Britain. Although theories of race and the terminology of racial science served to substantiate and justify particular attitudes, they did not give rise to them. Stereotypes of the Gypsies could often be employed without being embellished by explanations of the racial identity of the group. Moreover, the argument that there had once existed an honourable Gypsy who had since degenerated was not intrinsically dependent on theories of race. The discrepancy between the stereotypes was on occasion also explained in terms of some form of social or economic degeneration, which was neither explicitly nor implicitly, linked to ideas of race. Thus, even without theories of race, the two stereotypes of the Gypsies, the romantic and the degenerate image which persisted throughout the early twentieth

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<sup>12</sup> M. Biddiss, "Racial Ideas and the Politics of Prejudice 1850-1914" in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. XV, No. 3, 1972. p. 572.

<sup>13</sup> See for example D. Portbury, *Egypt Lane*, London: Cassell, 1935. pp. 5 and 9. See also G. M. Imlach *Freda's fortune. A book for Girls*, London: T.C and E.C Jack, 1907. p. 11. For references in government publications see *Report of Departmental Committee on Vagrancy. Minutes of Evidence*, of Captain James Fullarton, Chief Constable of Northumberland. para. 7560.

century, could still have operated as a coherent body of thought. Both those who opposed the Gypsies and those who remained attached to romantic stereotypes could have explained away the opposing stereotype by distinguishing between Gypsies of different social or economic status. It might, for example, have been claimed that the 'true' old-fashioned Gypsies skilfully engaged themselves in horse dealing and the production of useful handicrafts while 'pseudo' Gypsies dealt in scrap metal or hawked manufactured goods.

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It is possible to shed further light on responses to Gypsies in early twentieth century Britain by reflecting upon the treatment encountered by both other minority groups in Britain and their Gypsy counterparts elsewhere in Europe.

During the early twentieth century other minorities in Britain besides the Gypsies were vulnerable to antipathy. The Irish, for example, like the Gypsies, were often portrayed as animals or savages, inferior to the British people, and hostility towards this group persisted throughout the early twentieth century.<sup>14</sup> Other groups were regarded with suspicion because of cultural differences from the wider British society in the same way as the Gypsies attracted hostility owing to their itinerant way of life. The Chinese, though small in number, were believed to pose a threat of moral corruption through gambling and smoking opium.<sup>15</sup> As was the case with the Gypsies,

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<sup>14</sup> R Swift and S. Gilley, (eds) *The Irish in Britain 1815-1939*, London: Pinter, 1989. Especially chapters 6 and 9.

<sup>15</sup> C. Holmes, *A Tolerant Country? Immigrants, Refugees, and Minorities in Britain*, London: Faber and Faber, 1991. p. 22.

at times such opposition could take on the language of a biological theory of racial superiority or inferiority, while in some instances antipathy was expressed in social, cultural or economic terms.<sup>16</sup>

Such opposition was not always constant but would increase or decrease in response to broader social, political or economic circumstances. The political events leading up to the First World War, for example, caused hostility towards Germans and Austrians in Britain to increase dramatically.<sup>17</sup> Such tension between European powers also influenced responses to immigrant Gypsies in Britain as the case of the German Gypsies who arrived between 1904 and 1906 illustrates.<sup>18</sup> However, in some respects, the treatment of Gypsies in Britain was less likely to change in relation to historical circumstances than that of other minorities. The fact, in particular, that the Gypsies were rarely perceived to be in competition with the wider population for employment and housing meant that opposition to them was less closely linked to fluctuations in the employment and housing markets than was the case with other minorities. Hostility towards Russian and Polish Jews who arrived in Britain during the first years of the twentieth century, for example, was inflated by the perception of the group as competitors for housing in heavily overcrowded areas such as East London.<sup>19</sup> Economic hardship caused similar strains during the interwar period when

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<sup>16</sup> The influence of ideas biological theories of race on attitudes to different minority groups is discussed in G. Jahoda, *Images of Savages, Ancient Roots of Modern Prejudice in Western Culture*, London: Routledge, 1999. Chapter 6.

<sup>17</sup> P. Panayi, *German Immigrants in Britain during the Nineteenth Century 1815-1914*, Oxford: Berg, 1995. pp. 237-252. See also S. Yarrow "The Impact of Hostility on Germans in Britain, 1914-1918" in T. Kushner and K. Lunn (eds), *The Politics of Marginality. Race, the Radical Right and Minorities in Early Twentieth Century Britain*, London: Frank Cass, 1990. p. 97.

<sup>18</sup> See above.

<sup>19</sup> Holmes, *A Tolerant Country?* p. 20.

there were confrontations between white seamen in ports such as Cardiff and their black counterparts who were perceived by whites as an economic threat.<sup>20</sup>

However, responses to Gypsies were influenced by broader developments. It will be recalled, for example, that the First World War brought with it accusations of shirking and absenteeism against the Gypsies, while simultaneously the police considered that the problems associated with the group almost disappeared when the men were drafted into the forces. However, on the whole, responses to the Gypsies in early twentieth century were relatively constant. Although calls for action against the group might become louder when a piece of legislation which related to them was under consideration, the treatment of the group by the Central Government, local authorities, missionaries, scholars varied little during the period. In this respect, particularly strong parallels can be drawn between the Gypsies and the Jews. The Jews, like the Gypsies, were perceived in term of contradictory stereotypes which could be crafted into a coherent argument and used to justify antipathetic treatment. And, like the Gypsies, they experienced sustained intolerance in Britain during the early twentieth century.<sup>21</sup>

A consideration of the situation facing the Gypsies elsewhere in Europe during the early twentieth century reveals both parallels with their treatment in Britain and a

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<sup>20</sup> Holmes, *A Tolerant Country?* p. 35.

<sup>21</sup> T. Kushner, and K. Lunn (eds.), *Traditions of Intolerance. Historical Perspectives on Fascism and race Discourse in Britain*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989. R. Thurlow "Satan and Sambo: the Image of the Immigrant in English Racial Populist Thought Since the First World War" in K. Lunn, (ed.), *Hosts Immigrants and Minorities. Historical Responses to Newcomers in British Society 1870-1914*, Folkestone: Dawson, 1980. pp. 39-63.

chilling testimony on the implications of the biological ideas of race which existed throughout the Continent during this period.

The early decades of the century are littered with examples of suspicion and hostility towards Europe's Gypsies. As was the case in Britain, an interest in conducting censuses and surveillance of the Gypsies was evident across the Continent. In Britain, however, with the exception of the police census of Scottish nomads carried out in 1934, such efforts remained relatively localised. Elsewhere national surveys were undertaken. In 1905 citizens of Bavaria were urged to report all Gypsy activity to the Gypsy Affairs Office in Munich.<sup>22</sup> Similarly in 1906 a special register on Gypsies was started in Prussia.<sup>23</sup> Further action was taken over the following decades. In 1927 legislation was instituted in Prussia which required the photographing and fingerprinting of all Gypsies.<sup>24</sup> And, after April 1928 all Gypsies in Germany were placed under permanent surveillance.<sup>25</sup>

We have noticed in Britain various attempts to move Gypsies out of particular localities.<sup>26</sup> Elsewhere in Europe such antipathy led groups of Gypsies to leave their country altogether. Britain's German Gypsy visitors of 1904-06 arrived in the country

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<sup>22</sup> P. Panayi, *Ethnic Minorities in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Germany. Jews, Gypsies, Poles, Turks and Others*, Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2000. p. 97.

<sup>23</sup> I. Hancock, "Gypsy History in Germany and Neighbouring Lands" A Chronology Leading to the Holocaust and Beyond" in D. Crowe and J. Kolsti, (eds.), *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe*, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1992. p. 14.

<sup>24</sup> Hancock, "Gypsy History in Germany and Neighbouring Lands" p. 14.

<sup>25</sup> J. Liégeois, *Gypsies. An Illustrated History*, London: Al Saqi Books, 1986. p. 92.

<sup>26</sup> See above.

after fleeing 'anti-Gypsy terrorism' in Germany.<sup>27</sup> There are also examples of attempts by Governments to remove or prevent the arrival of immigrants Gypsies. It will be recalled that the departure of Britain's German Gypsies visitors was organised by the Government. It will also be remembered that the German Government was extremely reluctant to admit the Gypsies back into Germany. A similar example of two countries equally determined to prevent a group of Gypsies crossing their border occurred in 1908 when a group of Gypsies were held up between the Franco-Begian border for six months because neither country was prepared to admit them.<sup>28</sup>

At times the antipathy towards the Gypsies lead to attempts to bring about their assimilation. The calls for the assimilation of the Scottish nomads which persisted through the period under review were echoed elsewhere in Europe with differing degrees of severity. A particularly extreme example occurred in Hungary in 1909, when a policy conference on the Gypsies recommended the confiscation of their livestock and carts as well as permanent branding for the purpose of identification.<sup>29</sup> In Czechoslovakia, calls for the assimilation of the Gypsies were answered by law number 117 of 1927, which barred all wanderers from 'leading the life of Gypsies' and introduced compulsory identity cards for nomads in order to allow for increased government control over the group.<sup>30</sup> The calls in Britain for the children of the Gypsies to be removed from the influences of their parents were also reflective of a wider trend. Measures put into place in Prussia in 1901 enabled Gypsy

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<sup>27</sup>Hancock, "Gypsy History in Germany and Neighbouring Lands" p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> "Gypsies, Besieged, Give Guards the Slip. Nomads Held Up for Six Months on Franco-Begian Frontier" in *Western Morning News*, 29 April 1908; "Besieged Gypsies" in *Irish Daily Independent*, 7 April 1908.

<sup>29</sup> Hancock, "Gypsy History in Germany and Neighbouring Lands" p. 11.

<sup>30</sup> Liégeois, *Gypsies*, p. 110.



children to be removed from their parents by the state and placed into boarding schools.<sup>31</sup> And, in Switzerland in 1926, a policy was introduced of removing Gypsy children from their parents and placing them in foster homes; it remained effective until the mid-1980s.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, the following year in Czechoslovakia legislation was passed which enabled all Gypsy children under the age of fourteen to be removed from their parents by the courts and placed in children's homes or with respectable families.<sup>33</sup>

In considering such evidence, a difference can be discerned between the degree to which antipathy towards the Gypsies was institutionalised in Britain in comparison to elsewhere in Europe. Elsewhere legislators took such solutions to the 'Gypsy question' extremely seriously, whereas in Britain, calls for the assimilation of the Gypsies were largely ignored by the state. This is not to suggest that the British authorities were immune from antipathy. Indeed, a distaste for the nomadic life was expressed on a number of occasions, never more clearly, perhaps, than when immigrant Gypsies arrived in Britain from abroad. However, the British state consistently demonstrated an unwillingness to ratify openly assimilationist or repressive measures. This difference can largely be explained in terms of the liberal tradition in British politics.

Despite Britain's avoidance of harsh and repressive measures, the ideas used to justify such treatment of the group elsewhere in Europe also circulated in Britain.

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<sup>31</sup> Panayi, *Ethnic Minorities in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Germany*, p. 97.

<sup>32</sup> Frances Williams, "Swiss Shame over Stolen Children" in *The Times*, 8 June 1986. p. 10.

<sup>33</sup> Liégeois, *Gypsies*, p. 110.

For example, it has been observed that biological-based opposition towards the Gypsies was present in Britain during the early twentieth century. In Britain, the use of biological theories to justify a particular approach to the Gypsies was often vague and unscientific and did not have more than a marginal impact on official policy for dealing with the group. Elsewhere, however, such ideas played a pivotal role in policy-making. Although the action taken against the Gypsies by the Nazis was regarded as a policy of crime prevention, it was believed that the alleged criminal characteristics of the Gypsies were determined by their biological inheritance.<sup>34</sup> Thus the extermination of Gypsies by the Nazis was based on the understanding that German society had to be purged of inferior elements. Such policies must be regarded, not as an isolated blot on the history of twentieth-century Europe but as an extreme example of the application of ideas which existed across the Continent.

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<sup>34</sup> G. Lewy, *The Nazi Persecution of the Gypsies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. p. 25.

## Appendices

## Appendix One

Poem reprinted from M. Dawson, *Tinker's Twa in Peace and war*, Paisley :  
Alexander Gardner, 1921. p. 73.

### The Tinker in France

Young, strong, rugged, an ' tanned,  
I'm head o' a tinkers clan;  
'Cause we love the freedom oor faithers loved,  
we've answered the call to a man:  
From the depths o' oor free an' roving hearts  
Comes a loathin' o' tyrant foe-  
So I gathered my men on the bare hill side,  
An' I said to them, "Lads, we'll go."

'Before they spit oor bairns on steel,  
Or gie oor wives to worse,  
By heaven, they shall feel the tinker's thud,  
An' hear the tinker's curse.'  
Twenty bonnets spun into the air,  
An' we raised a rousin' chair,  
Oor women looked up frae the balzin' hag,  
An' we started a sleepin' deer.

Noo I'm here in the thick o' the hell-hatched row  
Wi' the seaforth fightin' men,  
But my thochts, as the head o' a tinker clan,  
Gang back to my hameland glen,  
Where I see my youngster roll on the moss,  
His limbs as bare as a stone, where I see  
the reek rise up frae a fire  
That is backed wi' peat an' cone;

Where I smell the stew frae a three-legged pot-  
It's a hare that I poached at will;  
"Thou shalt not" is never a law in France,  
where it's bigger game we kill:  
we've met them five an' ten to one,  
The murderin,' brutal Huns.  
Are we downhearted? No! No!! No!!!  
We're tinkers, but Britain's sons.

## Appendix Two

Postcards showing the German Gypsies as they travelled through Scotland in  
1906





### **Appendix Three**

#### **Extract taken from the papers of Chief Inspector John Monk (1859-1946) of the Metropolitan Police.**

In 1905 the Conservative Government brought in the Aliens Bill very largely at the instigation of Major Gordon but it was strongly opposed, and would have been lost but for the fact that five caravans of German gipsies, about thirty persons including children, landed at Batavia Wharf and set up camp on Tower Hill. The job of dealing with them was handed to me.

Again the language difficulty arose and it was some days before I found someone who could speak their little known German dialect.

It amazed the public to find that a band of people such as these could come into England and then camp in the heart of London quite freely and without even proper sanitary arrangements. As I recognised this was a good advert for the Aliens Bill I did not hurry myself unduly about seeing to their removal. The local authorities were non-plussed to find they had no powers to do other than order their removal to another site, and this the Stepney Council sanitary department eventually ordered.

In the meantime, I had obtained authority to go to the German Consul General to ask him to return the gipsies immediately to Germany, but this he bluntly refused to do.

For over a week they remained encamped at Tower Hill. When we moved them on they went to Essex where they caused endless trouble. As nobody there could speak their language, I had to spend my interpreter to assist the local police. Essex could only pass them on to the adjoining authority who, in turn, expelled them. So this process went until eventually they arrived in Hampstead in the "B" Division. I kept in close touch with their travels and sent my interpreter every time they clashed with the police.

Now that the gipsies were back in the Metropolitan Police area I received a direction to see the German Consul General again, but once more he flatly refused to take responsibility for their repatriation.

The Home Office now decided to defray the cost of returning the unwanted to Germany and I was directed to see the Dutch Consul General to find out if his Government would allow them to land in Holland and escort them to the German border, all of course, at the British Government's expense.

He readily agreed and advised me to tell the German Consul what we had arranged and at the same time to point out to him the great injury likely to accrue to foreigners in Britain if the gipsies remained. As he said, their arrival had made it almost certain that the Aliens Bill would go through, adding that he thought I ought to tell the German Consul this as well.

I reported my interview with the Dutch Consul to the Commissioner without delay. He sent me with a letter of introduction to the Home Office. There it was



decided that the matter was one for the Foreign Office and they gave me a letter to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs. When I saw him he said he was pleased with what I had done and handed me a letter to the Commissioner in which he said that, as I had gone so far, he thought I should personally acquaint the German Consul with what the Dutch Consul had said.

As we parted the Foreign Secretary said, "I think you and these people have got the Aliens Bill on the Statute Book."

I returned to the Commissioner and told him of the result of my interview with the Foreign Secretary. He agreed that I should see the German Consul again.

At the time of which I am writing, this gentleman was an imperious personage- a Count with a somewhat overbearing idea of his own importance. When I was ushered into his presence he said, "If you have come about those gipsies I have nothing to add to what I have already told you." As he said this he rose from his seat to end the interview and started to walk to the door, presumably to show me out. As he walked round the table, I walked in the opposite direction on the other side and remarked, "Pardon me, Sir, I have been directed by the Commissioner of Police to acquaint you with what has been done, and also that I have been asked by the Dutch Consul General to point out to you the injury these German nomads are likely to do to foreigners in this country."

He expressed surprise that our Government had not communicated with him direct, on which I pointed out how his flat refusal to me to take any action had

rendered it necessary for other steps to be taken. I quietly added that I was acting with full authority in seeing him as he gave me the impression that he did not think I had any.

Meanwhile, the gipsies had left Hampstead and were on their way back to Tower Hill. Stepney did not want them back. I saw the Mayor and Borough Surveyor, the interpreter, and two of the Surveyor's staff, met the gipsies opposite Commercial Street police station and ordered them to go back whence they had come.

They refused to move and with their horses and caravans camped in busy Commercial Street for several days with no sanitary arrangements. It was a nice object lesson for a country with no controls over aliens.

Passage was booked for them on a boat bound for Holland but Chief Inspector Cameron of "S" Division, not knowing what had been going on behind the scenes, before removing the gipsies from Hampstead, had communicated with the Society of Friends of Foreigners in Distress. They came to the gipsies' aid and paid their passage back and they were undoubtedly glad to do. They were quite ignorant of how opportune their arrival had been in facilitating the Aliens Act which duly became law. I received special thanks from the Commissioner.

#### Appendix Four

**A photograph of a group of Hungarian Gypsy coppersmiths camped at Earlsfield in 1911 after the Wandsworth Borough Council gave them notice to quit the site. Photograph taken by Scott Macfie of the Gypsy Lore Society.**



## **Appendix Five**

### **“Story of Church Army work in the New Forest and a Double Gipsy Wedding”, Unpublished papers of Captain L.C.C. Langridge, Dec 1972.**

I entered the C.A when I was 23 on the 28<sup>th</sup> October 1924. After a short stay at the Training College and passing exams, I was sent to the Winchester I Van and then on the Dorset Van, then on to the Winchester II Gipsy Mission Van; I was recalled to H for final training and when commissioned I went back as Captain-in-charge of the New Forest Van again, with a cadet to help me for a short period. We travelled around having fortnightly missions in parishes and a fortnight with Gipsies alternately. It was wintertime and cold in the van at night, when blankets froze to the walls! To have my services in the forest I put my lantern sheet on the side of the van, or in the trees, the Gipsies sitting on the ground while I had the open-air service with lantern slides on the life of our Lord. Then I used to travel visiting Gipsies in the area. One day I followed a track and found a tent. Inside was a Gipsy woman, with a new born baby with no baby clothes or food, so I went to the shops and got the needful things for the mother and babe.

Another time in December I was visiting in the Forest and as I walked towards the tents, A Gipsy woman said to her man inside the tent “here comes the man that marries ‘em, I wish he would talk to our Job and Daniel”, I thought, here’s trouble! And visited other tents before coming back to the old lady, and said “well, what have Job and Daniel been up to?” “Well” she said, “some years ago a C.A Captain got us married and our Job and Daniel are living with two women and they have children and are not married, would you talk to them?” So I waited until they drove up in a pony and trap and all aboard. The women went straight into the tent and the men were

unlocking the trap. I went up to them and chatted, then I said "You are not married are you?" It's not right to live like this, wouldn't you like to put things straight and get married?" "No" was the reply, "go and talk to the women!" So I went across to the tent, they wouldn't come out so I talked to them from outside and told them and asked again about marriage, but no they would not. So back to the men again and I tried to put it to them. After some time the men said "All right, we will if the women will!" So back to the women and I told them the men would, if they would. But No, they wouldn't get married at any price! Finally I said, "Well you know where my van is, I'm having a service tonight with your people, if you think any more about it, come and see me". The service began and lantern slides. In the middle of my talk a man sidled up to me and said "Captain, Mrs. wants to see you. I relied to Mrs. will have to wait until the service ends". Later when I had packed all the gear away they came into the van, with a crowd of relations and the man said "We think you were quite right Cap'n and we want to get married!"

I told him I would arrange it and let them know. Next day I went to the vicar and told him all about it, and asked "Would you call the Banns free and marry them free, as they are poor Gipsies?" To this he agreed.

I was going home for Christmas, but arranged the date for them to be married on New Year's Day to start the year well. I went then to a lady (who had money) and told her my story asking her help as I needed two rings, and I was given the money to buy them. Then on to another lady and I explained the plight of the two women who had no wedding clothes "Well, what size are the ladies?" and if I could get the measurements, she would see. I went back to the Gipsies and they had no tape

measure. I had a long piece of string in my pocket, so I told them to go inside and measure from top to bottom, waist etc. and tie a knot. Well, they both measured on the same end of the string, so I got them to say which measurements was which and I tool the string to the lady, saying "Here's a knotty problem for you!" We had a good laugh and finally provide the garments required. My sister gave hats and shoes. I had a good suit which I didn't have much time to wear and it fitted well and I bought two new caps. Another man I knew gave me one of his suits. I went home for Christmas. A friend of mine had a cake shop and he interested him and he took me into his shop and there was an iced cake, with a little house on it with the words "...house to let", a fir tree, a robin and a rabbit, he said if I could take it I could have it for them. Christmas over, I was on my way from Beckenham in Kent, back to the New Forest on my motorcycle and the cake in front of me, strapped round my neck and arrived safely. One Gipsy had a house near by in the forest and we arranged to have a meal the after the wedding.

I waited at the church, and a car with broken springs, full of Gipsies arrived. I didn't have flowers for button holes, but white ribbon. When I said to the men "when the vicar asks you a question, I will tell you what to say" (I was best man and gave the brides away). The men came in church with hats on, I told them to take them off in church, going down the isle they put them on again so I took them off. We got to the Chancel steps and on went their hats again, so I put them in front pew and said "you will have them later!"

The brides arrived and the service began, then vicar asked “Job, wilt thou have this woman to be thy wedded wife” (I prompted). He replied “I will”. “Elsie, wilt thou have this man to be thy wedded husband?” “I will”.

“Daniel, wilt thou have this woman to be thy wedded wife” (prompter “I Will”) Daniel “I will”.

“Florence, wilt thou have this man to be thy wedded husband?” “I will”.

The service over we went into the vestry to sign the register. The men could not write, so I had to sign for them and they put their X, likewise the womenfolk. Then out we went. A newspaper man took a photograph of us all which appeared in the local paper. They clambered into the old car and there was nowhere for me to sit, so I sat on the floor at their feet. After a bumpy ride, we arrived at the house for a meal, they were so excited that they could not cut the cake, so, I had to do that for them. Sometime afterwards I heard that they were still happily married. It is very rare that Gipsies come to church for marriages or have a double wedding.

My work was very interesting. I remember one Gipsy asking me to come and see her husband who was very ill and dying – I knelt in this tent with smoke of the fire and prayed with the man.

Another mother asked me to help her daughter, a teenager to read. I had some books for children on the life of Jesus, so I began with that. I only had a fortnight

before moving on, but at the end of that time she could read such words as, Jesus of Nasareth the carpenter's son.

Two Gipsy girls, one names Harriet, got first class certificates for scripture at school. They were very interested with the lantern slides in the Forest. Later in my first married station at Wokingham, the Rector being away, I had to go to the church in case anyone came, and this evening some Gipsies came. Their little baby was very ill and the doctor had said the child would not live through the night, so I baptised the child. The next morning I went again and the child lived. I just felt that something went out of me I baptised the baby. A little Gipsy girl who watched me baptise the baby saw me a day or so later, and called out to me, "You couldn't baptise my dolly for me could you?"



## Appendix Six

### Gypsy crime statistics compiled by the Gypsy Lore Society for the year 1910.

1. Damaging turf, etc by camping,	25	
Camping on the highway,	29	
Allowing horses to stray,	61	
Obstructing road, van unattended etc,	18	
Want of water supply or sanitary accommodation,	13	
Sleeping out,	2	
Making fires within fifty feet of road,	2	
	<hr/>	150
2. Furious riding or driving,	3	
Cart or van without lights,	7	
No name on cart or van,	4	
Dog without a licence, or collarless,	9	
Dog not under control,	1	
Hawking without a license,	6	
Breaking pound,	2	
School-attendance, etc,	12	
	<hr/>	44
3. Poaching,	27	
Taking wood, sticks etc,	8	
Fortune telling,	7	
Hoaxing with fortune telling,	10	
Gaming,	5	
Discharging gun,	1	
	<hr/>	58
4. Cruelty to horses,	7	
Begging,	1	
Cruelty to, or neglect of, children,	7	
Disgracing His Majesty's uniform,	1	
	<hr/>	16
5. Assaults (including assaults on police),	28	
Family quarrels,	8	
Drunkenness simple,	36	
with horses,	1	
with children,	5	
Obstructing police or concealing felons,	2	
Obscene language,	12	
	<hr/>	92
6. Thefts, Value less than ten shillings,	26	
,, Value more than ten shillings,	20	
Stealing by rue (not fortune-telling),	22	
Receiving stolen property,	1	
Unjust scales,	1	
	<hr/>	70
7. Murder (Pannell and Small)	2	
Arson,	2	
Abduction,	1	
Robbery with violence, highway robbery,	6	
	<hr/>	11
	<hr/>	441

## **Appendix Seven**

### **Extract from a report by B. Bishop of Cardiff City Police, Detective Department 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1934 entitled Tennis and Tom Stevenson – Travelling Gypsies**

About January 1932, two families of gypsies named Perras and Brisbois arrived in this city from Glasgow. They took over the shop and dwelling house No. 174 Bute Street, Cardiff, and the women quickly fitted out the shop for the telling of fortunes. The men folk, however, obtained their livelihood as coppersmiths and were chiefly employed repairing brass and copper in Roman Catholic Churches etc.

On or about the 31<sup>st</sup> February 1933 a number of families of the gypsy class named Stevenson and Sterio arrived in this city from Liverpool and took over the houses Nos. 157, 205, and 211 Bute St.

The principal of this gypsy tribe appeared to be an aged man named Tennis Evon Stevenson and his wife who resided at No. 205 Bute Street, with a number of young men and their wives and children. All these people were of a distinctly foreign appearance and were dressed in gaudy clothing. The men described themselves as metal workers and coppersmiths and during the time they were here they did a large amount of work of that class in the Roman Catholic Churches in the City and surrounding districts. Shortly after they settled here they purchased four second motor cars – three “chryslers” and one “Buick”. They paid for the cars by cheques received for work done by them in the Roman Catholic Churches.

The women folk of the party professed to be fortune tellers and in consequence of complaints received two of them were arrested, viz.; -

Lizzie Stevenson and Lena Stevenson upon charges of professing to tell fortunes, and at the Cardiff City Police Court on the 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1933 they were each fined 40/- and costs or one month upon several charges of professing to tell fortunes. Their method was to enter into an interesting conversation with a shopkeeper, and profess his or her fortune. It was alleged – but the injured persons would not substantiate their allegations Police Court proceedings – that these women usually asked for a sum of money in order that they might hold it in their hands. They would then pretend to ‘bless’ the money return it to the person who had handed it to them and then quickly leave the shop. It was then discovered in many instances that they had only restored part of the money which had been handed to them. As stated the injured parties were reluctant to take proceedings as they know that considerable publicity would inevitably result.

During the time this tribe of gypsies was residing in this city as Larry Evon – aged 17 years, and believed to be the son of Tenis Evon Stevenson, married a Cardiff girl, also aged 17 years, the daughter of a low class woman named Catherine Pidell, who has been the associate of coloured men for many years.

The whole tribe of gypsies left this city about the first week of March 1933 and appeared to have proceeded to the Midlands as several complaints as to their honesty were subject to special enquiries...

...The Stevenson tribe appears to have travelled extensively. They have considerable knowledge of Greece, Australia and Canada. Sterio asserted when in

custody in this city that his mother was in Greece and his father in Australia. I am reliably informed that they have plenty of money and this they appear to obtain by fortune telling and 'sharp practice' methods. The whole tribe are a very dangerous, cunning set of rogues and vagabonds. Their mode of life does not permit them to reside for any length of time in any particular City or town.

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